

AMBIGUITY





Ambiguity

A Villain / Vigilante Deku Zine

Moderators



Sonder

Head

I'm so glad that everyone's as excited about vigilante and villain Deku as I am! It was fantastic getting to work with so many lovely people to create this project, and an amazing experience overall. Thank you to everyone who participated!



Caia

Graphics & Layout

This is the first zine I've had the pleasure of formatting and I'm so happy it turned out the way it did. It was amazing to be able to work on this project from the very beginning and I'm so proud of everyone for all the incredible work they've put in. To Vigilante! Izuku :D !!



Bazi

General

I never expected so much love for one of my favourite Izuku tropes, and I'm still blown away by everyone's dedication to this project! It's been a delight to work with such an amazing team, and I'm so happy with how this project turned out. Thank you all for your hard work! I hope everyone who reads through this zine loves it like we do.

Writers



Leafy

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Peter Henry

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Artists



Lemon

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Zauber

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kacchansass

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Aya

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Mieaou

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Domi

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JY.CC

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Merch



LittleRain



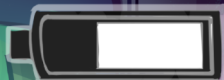
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yallmightjr



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what we were told, what you believed, what i became

– Leafy

In the aftermath of the Slime Villain incident—in light of his conversation with All Might on that rooftop, and all the painful revelations he was forced to face—the first seeds of doubt take root within Izuku's mind.

The hero system and the heroes he looks up to live behind a screen of deception and white lies. Even *All Might*. All Might, who hides behind his bright smile even though his body is withering away. All Might, the hero Izuku has looked up to ever since he could walk—the same person who told him that *a pro hero should always be ready to risk their life*, and in the same sentence, *can one become a hero without power? I think not*.

Why does society necessitate having a Quirk to be an official hero when heroic acts can easily be performed *without* one?

Even after Izuku's legs carried him forward towards the Sludge Villain—in that moment, his blood was alight with the instinct to save, regardless of his wellbeing or the rules—and even after All Might caught up to him and brought Izuku's world to its knees, those same doubts remain as shadows in his conscience.

There are dozens of heroes with non-combative Quirks. Eraserhead is a ruthlessly efficient hero. His Quirk only levels the playing field in a fight by forcing everyone else to fight Quirkless. Mandalay is a highly-ranked hero, despite *Telepath's* non-combative nature.

Those seedlings of doubt have taken root; they only grow by the day, seemingly.

After meeting All Might and seeing a glimpse at a brighter future, weighing up his options more intently is only natural. One-for-All is extraordinary. As long as Izuku is careful, it's a golden ticket into the future he's always been reaching out towards.

But.

Weary, his gaze drifts to his bookshelf, stuffed to the brim with the journals, magazines and various memorabilia he's gathered over the years.

His analysis notebooks, well-loved and smothered in pencil smudges, aren't just full of analysis on Quirks. Why only focus on Quirks when the support gear tailored to them is just as crucial? Why only focus on heroes when the support companies working behind the scenes are just as important to heroic success?

And then, there are the heroes in the shadows—those who save people without reward or recognition because it's the right thing to do. And it would be easy to join them. The world isn't kind to people with villainous Quirks, or those who lack Quirks all together—but that same category of people make up the majority of underground heroes and vigilantes.

People who don't use their Quirks to help people. *Heroes* who save people and don't have Quirks at all. They exist in spite of a society that tells them they won't amount to anything. It's only *natural* that Izuku admires that kind of tenacity.

One-for-All is a golden ticket, yes, and holding its light will open a great many doors. It's a blessing for which Izuku is eternally grateful.

But being accepted into a hero course solely *because* of his Quirk is never what he wanted. It should be about effort, intention and heart, not

about whether or not he has a Quirk that's combat-suited and flashy. Even though All Might was quick to reconsider his words from that rooftop, the fissure driven in his faith remains.

What is the value of a Quirk? None of them are inherently heroic or villainous. There are plenty of scenarios that call for silent, covert measures—things that can't be achieved with a powerful and flashy Quirk.

A few clips immediately spring to mind. All Might's fights, Endeavour's, even less highly ranked heroes like the Wild Wild Pussycats, they all have one thing in common: crowds flock to observe them fight, and everything is harder for the heroes because of how *flashy* their Quirks are.

The idea of being watched so closely wedges an icicle into his gut. It would be far easier to choose a more covert method of doing hero work.

Eraserhead doesn't have to deal with those crowds. Stendhal doesn't. Knuckleduster doesn't. Through, Stendhal doesn't really count anymore, not after rebranding himself as *The Hero Killer: Stain*.

Izuku shakes his head, hastily dispelling those thoughts. *Two out of three of those people were vigilantes. I can't break All Might's trust by doing that.*

Well, becoming an underground hero is the comfortable middle ground, right? Izuku pushes those thoughts to the back of his mind and closes his laptop, eyelids drooping in his exhaustion. His eyes wander to his ajar door, and his shoes nestled just behind it.

It's a calm night; pleasantly cool with clear skies—perfect conditions to

jog in. Just to clear his cluttered head.

With a sigh, Izuku tugs on his shoes and nudges open his bedroom door—it's late, he really doesn't want to wake his mom and worry her. Neither she nor All Might would be pleased to know that he's running so late at night. Ordinarily, Izuku wouldn't find himself doing so either, but his mind has been restless; his thoughts like a violent whirlwind keeping him from restful sleep.

Silently, he pushes the door shut and flicks his hood over his head.

The nightly air is temperate—Izuku stretches, relishing in the straining of his muscles, and rolls his shoulders before setting off on the familiar route his jogs take. Even before meeting All Might, running was an escape from the reality of school; of his Quirklessness.

Izuku has always been a quick runner. From bullies to safety. From normality to hero fights. His legs are more than strong enough to allow him to keep running forward, towards the future. He turns a corner, his breaths steady and rhythmic, and continues into Musutafu's shadowed depths.

The city is eerily motionless, the streets swathed in darkness which only parts for the occasional car. Izuku's pace quickens. Even without a Quirk, Izuku can run fast, and he can run *far*. Green eyes scan the darkness, each dip between storefronts where alleyways are tucked away into and every building that isn't hidden in the darkness.

Sounds are more prominent at night. Car engines, distant footsteps of other joggers.

Voices. A muffled yelp.

Izuku turns on his heel, slipping down a familiar byroad—it leads to the opening where Mt. Lady fought Barrage a week and a half ago, if his memory serves him correctly—and in the direction of those sounds. The pounding of his feet against the earth is soothing.

Immediately, he notices the silhouettes standing in the alley between a store Izuku remembers buying a notebook once, and the fancy cafe with the expensive, imported coffees.

This is why he went running.

In a city as big as Musutafu, there's always *something* happening. Especially on nights like this—the quiet ones, so still and peaceful that it's easy to assume nothing is wrong. Izuku scowls, and even though his hands are clammy, he breaks into a sprint towards the pair.

"Hey! What are you doing?!"

Something he's learned from years of torment at the hands of his peers—people run away from the unexpected. Running in and making a fuss can quickly deter them.

A Quirk was never *necessary* to stop crime. It just makes doing so quicker and easier. Quirkless *never* meant harmless, and it *never* meant useless. It took far too long, but cleaning that beach—seeing the surprised, grateful smiles on the faces of the occasional passerby who catches him working—has taught him that. It's something he wishes he'd learned earlier.

Something that's shifting the lifelong dream he's held so dear for so long into a different form. Izuku isn't sure he minds the direction it's veering towards.

They nod, eyes wide and stunned. When Izuku offers a hand, they take it –he can feel them shaking, but doesn't bring it up. His heart is flying in his chest, and the thrill of adrenaline has never tasted sweeter.

At the end of the night, that's the only incident he interferes with. Going for a run so late *specifically* to stick his nose into incidents like that is reckless, but Izuku doesn't *actually* feel like getting killed any time soon– nor does he feel like having to explain himself to All Might if he shows up to training exhausted again. Izuku's hands shake, and it isn't from the cold.

But it feels *good*. Making a difference. Actually doing good in the world. The thrill of it is intoxicating, addictive; it's exactly what motivates Izuku to continue going out on late-night jogs. What's the personal harm in it? It isn't as if his grades in class are suffering, because Izuku knows he's *smart*, and he doesn't need any kind of analysis or memory Quirk to ace middle school tests, either.

Quirks aren't necessary for a lot of things, Izuku has come to realise. He stretches, sighing in relief. Quirks aren't necessary to do heroic acts– and, frankly, neither is a hero license.

Those lingering thoughts persist, growing further and rooting deeper until they are a steadying presence, anchored in the core of his very being. The seedling of his newfound sense of direction has grown tall, nurtured by the doubts within him building up little by little, over time.

Vigilantes aren't under anyone's thumbs. There's no HPSC to worry about. Nobody can force a vigilante to do something they don't want to, and there are no rules keeping them from intervening where intervention is sorely required. Izuku swallows, chewing lightly on the tip of his pen.

I'll ask All Might.

Worst comes to worst, All Might will be perplexed, if slightly apprehensive—and Izuku can excuse his question on his recent study of The Crawler’s exploits a few years ago. Simple as. Izuku just needs to wait until the next full training day, and wheedle it into a conversation as subtly as possible.

That day arrives *much* more quickly than he anticipated—All Might messages him the next day, and Izuku can’t exactly *not* show up when the Number One Hero is already waiting for him to arrive at Dagobah.

“I’m heading out, Mom!”

Izuku sprints the distance to the beach. Another perk of late-night jogging: it’s *much* easier to bridge the distance than it was even three weeks ago. He’s greeted swiftly by the skeletal, emaciated form of All Might’s civilian identity—he waves, a familiar and comforting smile firmly in place. The mere sight of it wipes away some of his worries.

And thus, they end up going about a normal day—except Izuku’s thoughts weigh the world, and the weight of them is suffocating. He takes a deep breath, and drops the scrap he’s holding into the dump truck.

“All Might? I have a question. It’s... important.”

“What is it?”

They’ve both stopped, now; the sun an uncomfortable and overbearing pressure overhead. Izuku swallows harshly.

“How do you feel about vigilantes? About what they do, and how they do it?”

All Might’s eyes don’t waver in their intensity as they bore into Izuku;

something akin to perplexion shining brightly through them.

Briefly, Izuku recalls his failsafe—to mention old vigilantes he’s been looking at.

But is it *really* worth lying to All Might? He chose *Izuku*, of every more suitable candidate for One-for-All. If he says no, then Izuku will go forward with his childhood dream: possessing a Quirk and joining U.A.’s hero course.

Steeling himself, Izuku sucks in a long breath, his fists clenching.

“I’ve been thinking about it for a while now. You’re an amazing hero, All Might. And One-for-All is your legacy as a hero. I don’t want to spit on that, or ruin it, but I’ve been thinking long and hard about it, and... there’s a lot that’s... *wrong* with the hero system. It’s selfish and I’m biased, but I can’t... I’m sorry, I’m not making any sense, am I?”

Much to his surprise, there’s no scorn on All Might’s gaunt face; surprise, certainly, and maybe a tinge of shock, but nothing close to the ridicule he’d been expecting. No, All Might leans down, handing him a bottle of water, and pats on a reasonably secure looking piece of scrap.

“It’s alright, Young Midoriya. Why don’t you take a breather?”

Truthfully, the breather is unnecessary—Izuku has spent nights pouring over the words in his throat, trying to piece them into coherency. He’s thankful for it, nonetheless.

“It’s not that I suddenly don’t want to be a hero anymore, or anything, it’s just that—well. Some people are only heroes by official status. And some people do amazing things, but don’t get any reward for it because they don’t do it *to be* rewarded, they do it because it’s the right thing to do. It’s just an idea. If you think it’s the wrong move, I’ll stick to the hero

course.”

Silence.

It’s never been comforting, but now Izuku wants nothing more than to dig a hole into the sand and climb into it, never to return. All Might’s expression has never been so impossible to read. *Oh, god, I messed up.*

Naturally, his thoughts slip from his brain without his mouth’s permission.

“I’m Quirkless. I didn’t used to hate that fact. I never liked it, but it’s only when everyone else started saying that I was *broken* or *worthless* that I started to really hate it. But I’ve seen videos of Quirkless vigilantes stopping crimes that a hero might see as unworthy of their time to resolve. There’s other things, too, vigilantes don’t have to benefit of being paid for their work so corruption is a lesser issue, and they historically have incident resolution rates almost constantly matching those of underground heroes, staying down-low and only surfacing to resolve an issue; that’s what I’ve always wanted, I don’t want money or fame or *anything* like that, I just want to help people out, and—”

“You seem to have put a lot of thought into this.”

“I have a lot of time to think about this when I go running at night.” Izuku kicks at the sand until he uncovers a glint of metal. Crouching down, he picks it up. “People deserved to be saved. I don’t care much for all the stupid laws that have been put up that make it more difficult for that to happen. It’ll keep mom safe, too. If nobody knows who I am. It’ll keep her safe as long as I do it all right.”

“Well... I can’t say that I’m not surprised, young Midoriya.” Izuku’s heart falls, dejection washing through his veins. *He’s going to say no.*

"But I understand where you're coming from. Things are slightly different for me, as the Symbol of Peace, but there *are* a lot of times where laws can get in the way of a timely rescue. Legally, I shouldn't endorse vigilantism—but your heart is in the right place. It takes a brave soul to go against what we publicly view as 'good' and 'bad' and work in the gray area in between. I've worked with a couple of vigilantes before, did you know?" Izuku blinks. *What?* "They're no less heroic than anybody with a license. Oh—but you didn't hear that from me, of course."

"Wait, hang on, does that—? I mean, it sounds like you—"

"It isn't my job to dictate your future, nor should I choose the path you take. It's my job to make sure One-for-All rests in trustworthy, noble hands. That hasn't changed."

The world turns wobbly with unshed tears. Izuku stares at the sand—just because he's cried in front of All Might before *doesn't* mean being so openly vulnerable around him, especially now, is comfortable yet. What *is* comforting is the reassuring hand on his shoulder, and the smile in All Might's voice. The silent communication of *it's okay*.

"If that is the decision you want to make, who am I to contest it? If the Ninth holder of One-for-All is making that decision, I can only do my best to support you as the Eighth. I've got to look out for my successor, right?"

Don't cry. For the love of god, stop crying. Izuku swipes at his eyes, sniffing thickly as he pulls in a few steadying breaths. All Might is smiling again—more readable, even in his emaciated form. That's enough reassurance for Izuku.

"I'll still go to U.A., to the support course, that way I can still be in the loop, and I can still learn more and get better."

All Might hums quietly. "You wouldn't be involved in the hero training classes."

That draws Izuku up short. Figuring out One-for-All on his own would take far too long, but it isn't exactly like he can ask one of the teachers for sparring practice as a support student. "I... guess I can check to see if there are any private Quirk trainers in Musutafu. Someone who can help me get to grips with One-for-All."

"There is *one* person I can think of who fits that bill well, young Midoriya. One who also knows of One-for-All's secret. My teacher."

He does *not* sound enthused. Izuku blinks. All Might looks like he's swallowed something awfully bitter—and he looks as if he'd rather face down a horde of angry villains than talk to whoever his teacher is.

"Wait wait wait, *your* teacher? As in, the person who taught *you* how to use One-for-All? How old *is* he?"

"...Don't worry about that for now. I'll arrange for you to meet with him... You just worry about training, and the support course entrance exam."

Izuku doesn't speak again, deep in thought for the remaining duration of the day. Thankfully, All Might doesn't seem to take it personally. His presence is subdued, but reassuring; a fact for which Izuku is eternally grateful.

And time goes on. Dagobah turns from a trash-filled wasteland to a gleaming expanse of golden sand; Izuku is so tired he could collapse when All Might comes by and sees the fruit of his labour.

The sun shines brightly over the crystal ocean when Izuku is gifted One-for-All. The Quirk weighs everything and nothing simultaneously—but in the depths of his heart, he *knows* the Quirk is meant to be his. It feels

right. It's the first on a growing list of blessings in Izuku's life. The Support Course is a wonderful place—though, Hatsume is *frighteningly* intense about her work—and Izuku doesn't regret choosing the path that shies away from the bright spotlight of heroics at all. This is *far* more fulfilling.

"Your path is your own, kid. A lot of One-for-All users stuck to the shadows, it doesn't make you less of a good person."

Well, if *All Might* himself is willing to support Izuku, choosing to train in the shadows to save people—to become a vigilante—*can't* be the wrong choice.

And Izuku isn't going to let anyone else say otherwise.

Vigilante-Nine:

2.

3.

4.



ONE OF THESE DAYS
YOU'RE GONNA GET
YOURSELF KILLED.

2 INCREASE THE PADD
AKE AROUND MY JOINTS I CAN
BL... E IMPACT WITH LES
CK. I'LL NEED TO TEST
ITS OF WHAT THE EQUIP
HANDLE, SO I'LL HAVE TO
A CALL IN THE MORN

the light you seek is within you

– Starry

Eri's been having a rough day.

Her guardian (a word she's not quite accustomed to using, as she's been told that it's a term for someone who watches and cares for her), is not happy with the men in the uniforms that stand in the teacher's lounge in U.A. She hears a snippet of, "What do you MEAN he's escaped?!" before violent shushing settles him into silent rage, and she can no longer hear the low muttering that occupies the other side of the room.

There's a gentle tap at her shoulder.

Eri whirls around, breath catching for a second before she relaxes upon seeing the easy-going smile and bright blue eyes. "Lemillion," she whispers, and Mirio winks before shielding her away from the adults.

"What's going on?" She tugs gently at his sleeve, and Mirio places a comforting hand on her shoulder. "They're talking about me, right? I did something wrong, and they're going to give me away because I messed up?"

She can feel the burn in her eyes; tears are unfortunately a familiar concept to her upbringing, but sometimes she falls back into former habits. Mirio balks for a moment before lifting her chin up, smiling carefully at her. "They're not mad at you," he soothes, which means it is about her. "It's just... something's happened, Eri, and I need you to know right now that we're going to keep you safe no matter what."

Oh.

Contrary to popular belief, even if Eri is indeed a child, she's pretty smart. There's a faint tremor running through Mirio's body and although he's smiling, Eri knows what it means.

She stumbles back, moving out of his presence. "He's coming back for me," she says hoarsely, and feels the phantom pain crawl over her skin again. She remembers the golden eyes and the grin hidden by the plague mask, and sobs quietly, remembering to choke on her tears before he could reprimand her again and threaten her with longer testing days.

"No," Mirio promises, trying to comfort her. "I swear we'll protect you, Eri! I know Aizawa will protect you again like he did the first time. He got you away from Chisaki then, and he'll do it again."

At that, Eri pauses.

She's terrified, sure, but she knows this for a fact. It's so surprising to her that she actually stops her tears for a few moments to look up at Mirio, puzzled. "He didn't get me out of there," she says slowly, and Mirio's eyebrows furrow in a way that makes him look like a puppy. "H-He picked me up off the streets, but he didn't get me away from *him*, that was someone else."

An emotion she can't place travels over Mirio's face as he tries to decipher precisely what she's talking about. "The police said you escaped from Chisaki," Mirio says with a tone of uncertainty, "and then Aizawa found you running away from the alley on his way home from the grocery store. Did... did someone break you out from there?"

Eri scrunches up her nose with all the confidence she feels she doesn't have. "Yes," she stresses. "He was very nice and made sure I was okay when we were running away. He kept telling me I was going to be okay, and I actually believed him. He saved me back then. I wish I could tell

him thank you."

She watches as Mirio's eyes go huge, quickly excusing himself before hurrying over to Aizawa. She takes note of the way Aizawa's entire body stiffens as he excuses himself to the officers and walks on over to her, crouching down to be at her level.

"Eri," Aizawa exhales softly. "Do you remember the day I found you?"

Eri nods. It's a bit muddled, especially since she's been with him for at least three months now. She's trying to learn how to be a child for the first time, so her memory's a bit fuzzy. "I ran out of the alley and right into your legs."

"That was all you told me," Aizawa replies. "Was there anyone else who helped you?"

"There was," she murmurs. "He was a very nice boy. They—They were moving me, because my last caretaker failed, and I tried running again, but this time was different because he found me and gave me to you."

"Who found you?" Aizawa gently presses. He doesn't look upset or angry, so Eri does her best to remember, furrowing her brow. "Before me, who was he? Do you know what he looked like?"

Eri's memory is murky, faint as an image calls to her; a boy who held her in a way no one had ever held her before. He was kind, and he was safe. He was the definition of a true hero, and no one would tell her otherwise.

"Green eyes," is all she says. "And his name was Deku."

—

U.A. *tries*.

Oh, they try.

There are still security breaches unaccounted for, gaps in the system that even Nedzu's Specs cannot identify. One more villain attack is nearly expected at this point, and Eri can barely find it in herself to be surprised when her caretaker for the day, Kayama, is mobbed upon stepping out of the restaurant they were eating at.

One second is all it takes. A van pulls up and the door slides open to reveal Chisaki Kai himself, looking quite proud as he steps out. She spots Kurono in the driver's seat, tapping his fingers against the wheel. "Eri," Chisaki croons, and Eri almost lets out a whimper as she backs away, shaking hands grasping onto the dress that Aizawa picked out for her.

"How have you been, spending time with these so-called *heroes*?" Chisaki practically spits from behind his mask. "Have you learned that not even the most famous hero academy in all of Japan cannot keep you safe? I will always find you, little one; you and I are destined for greatness."

"No," Eri whispers, looking around for anyone that could help her. They're all absorbed in their own little worlds, barely paying attention as she tries to gather the courage to scream or yell or kick. "The heroes will protect me, just like De—"

"That fucking *brat* isn't a hero," Chisaki snarls, getting closer with every step. "He only prevented me from reaching my dream sooner. That pest won't be getting in the way anytime soon. Kurono, is anyone else in the area?"

"No one yet," comes Kurono's smooth voice as he points a silver arrow

at her from his hair. Eri can remember the way its slowness settles into her bones like a poison and tries to see if her voice works. "No one's coming to save her."

Eri's entire life has been full of consistent disappointments. She's been let down by her family, by the heroes, and by society, but she'll still hold onto a bit of hope just in case someone's out there listening. She readies her tiny fists the way Aizawa had taught her a while ago, feeling a surge of *something* rise in her chest. Gold starts to spark around her hands (and her horn, but she doesn't notice) as she tries to remember the smile that changed her life.

If Eri's going to be taken back, she won't go down without a fight.

Right as she bares her teeth in a manner that *could* resemble a smile, a hand drops on her head. "Eri!" A boy's voice says excitedly, gently ruffling her silver hair. "Wow, I thought I recognized you! Who's your friend?"

Eri freezes and slowly turns to the boy that's smiling at her. He's got black hair that turns a deep shade of green when he leans into the sunlight, and freckles coat his cheeks like constellations. Before she can say anything, something glitters in his eyes that makes her breath catch.

He's—

"Who the hell are *you*?" Chisaki rumbles dangerously. Kurono casts a worried look over his shoulder at how long they're taking. "Are you aware of who I am? Boy, you stand in front of the leader of the Shie Hassaikai, the most famous Yakuza organization in all of Japan."

The boy gives a simple shrug, hands slightly out of his pockets. He's in a casual All Might hoodie and red shoes that don't match anything, but the way he rocks side-to-side tells Eri that he's ready to move. "I can

easily recognize you due to your mask," the boy replies, giving him an easy-going grin. "Chisaki Kai, Quirk: Overhaul. You can disassemble and assemble anything if it's within a reasonable time constraint. I would wonder if it applies to humans, but," and his entire face shifts to something quite feral, teeth bared, "I think we both know it does."

Chisaki's eyes darken even more and Eri presses herself into the boy's warm body. If this is who she thinks it is—and it *has* to be, because who else would know to carefully hold her?—then she knows she'll be okay no matter what.

"Deku," Chisaki's voice is a low rumble that feels like it vibrates through the ground. Eri whimpers, eyes squeezed shut, and she's suddenly underground again. There's whispers in her ears and blood splatters on the wall; the smell is metallic and it's making her feel ill. She remembers the roar of rage as they fled together through the halls, scurrying up a hidden staircase and to the sunlight outside. "You've been a thorn in my side since you stole her from me. Maybe this time, Eri will learn her lesson when this street is painted in your blood."

"Call the ambulance," Deku replies, muscles tensing. There's a grin in his tone that makes Eri look up, surprised at the unafraid response. "But not for me."

It happens in a flash. A jet of water shoots from over Deku's shoulder and strikes Chisaki directly in his face. He splutters for a second, momentarily winded, and Deku takes the opportunity to rush forward and kick Chisaki directly in the crotch.

The leader of the Shie Hassaikai crumples without a word, Kurono frantically goes to rip his seatbelt off, and Deku immediately scoops Eri up. His hands automatically wrap around her shoulders and under her legs, and she *knows* it's him.

"You came back," Eri whispers, and Deku smiles at her as he rushes away from the van, slipping into the shadows of the nearby buildings. "You actually came back for me."

"Of course I did!" Deku says cheerfully as he checks to make sure they aren't being followed. "I know Eraserhead is doing his best to take care of you, but I have to make sure you're safe too. No kid deserves any of this at such a young age too."

Eri wrinkles her nose at that. She feels like she *should* be scared of Kurono potentially going after them, but just knowing that it's Deku that's holding her is really doing wonders on her paranoia. "You don't look that old, though."

Deku sheepishly grins. "Nah, I'm only sixteen. You're my second kid I've saved now! I feel like I could make this a side-gig, ha, but then of course I wouldn't be able to focus on my school work and then I'd lose time on updating my blog and I'd miss a lot more fights, and how can I do my analyses if I don't have my notes down for the blog—"

"Deku," Eri interrupts as they walk into a cat cafe. Deku keeps on mumbling as he heads towards a younger boy sat on the floor, playing with a gorgeous tabby. Upon seeing the two of them, the boy leaps to his feet and freezes when he sees Eri, eyes going wide.

"Deku," Eri tries again. She huffs when Deku carefully puts her down and manages to hide a smile when the boy comes on over to smack Deku on the arm. "Sorry," the boy gruffly says. "He gets into his zone and it's so annoying."

Deku yelps at the smack and snaps out of it. "Kouta," he wearily replies. "I know we've had this talk before. Using your Quirk against an infamous Yakuza leader really isn't your best move, kiddo, but I'm impressed you got here before I did. You okay?"

"I'm fine," Kouta snaps. "But *you* could've been injured! You got lucky with me and I had to be a distraction to help you with her."

Deku looks mildly affronted at that and Eri takes the opportunity to look closer at Kouta. She doesn't recognize him, but she *does* realize where she's heard his name before. "Kouta... Izumi?" She asks quietly, and when his head snaps over to her, she knows she's right. "The Pussycats are your family. Mr. Aizawa said there was a villain attack and they were there, and so were you. They said you had gone missing."

"I wasn't missing!" Kouta crosses his arms, miffed. Deku doesn't say a word and instead scratches the back of his head sheepishly. "I was spending some time by myself and a villain showed up. Deku came in to save me and made sure I got back to Shino so I wasn't killed. I owe him my life."

"Deku came in to save me too," Eri whispers. There's a moment where the two kids stare at each other, and understanding flashes through them. Kouta nods in acknowledgement and looks back at Deku. "So you're keeping tabs on her too, huh?"

Deku's dark green curls shake as he nods, a faint blush rising on his face. "Yeah," he admits, looking a bit embarrassed. "Look, I want to make sure you guys are safe! I had to be sure the League of Villains wasn't going after Kouta, and I had to be sure that Chisaki wouldn't come after you, Eri."

"But he did," Eri replies, suddenly remembering that they were indeed on the run from an incredibly powerful villain. "Wait, Deku, he's going to hunt you down! He's, he's going to kill you, no one's ever been able to stop him before—"

"I may be Quirkless," Deku starts off, and Eri's mouth snaps shut so *fast*, "but I make up for it with plans. Kouta, could you ask the staff to turn on

the TV?"

As Kouta hustles off, Deku turns back to Eri. "We don't have a lot of time," he says happily, and pats the top of her head. "If my plan worked, then Eraserhead should be on his way here already. I gotta leave before he tries to arrest me."

A thousand questions are swirling in Eri's mind, bubbling to the tip of her tongue. The way she spits them out is the most forceful she's ever been and catches Deku by surprise. "Why would Mr. Aizawa arrest you?!" She cries out, reaching for him. Deku catches her as she presses herself to his chest. "You didn't do anything wrong! You saved and protected me, you broke into the house just to get me out!"

"I did, and I'd do it again." Deku says confidently. "It needed a lot of planning, so I'm really sorry it took so long. But I'm not a hero so it doesn't count under the law. They technically have the right to arrest me for being a vigilante, which means I gotta go back to my mom's and make sure they don't know who I am."

Eri takes all of Deku in; although he has the stance of someone who knows what they're doing, he's still trembling a tiny bit. He's fiddling with something in his pocket and she realizes that he's also just a kid, only slightly older than her. Mr. Aizawa always taught her to observe as many details as she could, and she suddenly pieces together the backstory when she catches sight of his scars.

Plenty of jagged scars coating his arms, being Quirkless, his protective instinct over seeing people in trouble... Eri knows an unofficial hero when she sees one, but Deku is the first one that makes her want to see what it's all about.

"—Our live reports indicate that the Pro Heroes have detained the leader of the Shie Hassaikai," a woman's voice startles them both. Eri whips

around to the TV and gasps when she sees Chisaki being pushed into the Iron Maiden. Deku makes a satisfied noise at the sight. *"Chisaki Kai, known as the Yakuza leader Overhaul, managed to escape from prison and will now be transferred to Tartarus after the attempted kidnapping of a little girl whose name we are currently omitting. There are several other charges against Chisaki, and the police and Pros will be taking these into account when charging him."*

"Oh thank god," Deku breathes out a sigh of relief. "I was really hoping this time it'd work. I got Kouta to leave a note before he saved our butts back there so the Pros would see it, and then I know Eraserhead is pretty much always trying to keep an eye on you so I know he's going to track us here."

"He's on his way here?!" Eri squeaks, hands pushing furiously at his chest. "Then you have to leave! I don't want him to take you away!"

Deku opens his mouth to say something—what it is, she'll never know—but the door gets thrown open. Aizawa comes rushing in with his capture weapon curling around his body, and freezes for a split second when he spots Eri and Deku. Kouta ducks out of sight at the countertop and does his best to stay out of the spotlight.

"Eri!" Aizawa shouts, scarf whipping towards Deku. Kouta almost gasps out loud, and Eri finds that something quite strange happens to her; her body moves before she thinks about it.

She throws herself in front of Deku, arms out wide and shaking. "He got me away from Overhaul!" She shouts, gold starting to flicker in her palms. "Please, Mr. Aizawa, he didn't do anything wrong!"

Aizawa whips his binding cloth away from Eri and lets out a huff, glaring at Deku. "He's a *kid*, Eri." He says flatly. Deku lets out a quiet wheeze when Aizawa's eyes glow a vicious shade of red and his hair rises.

"You're Erasing my Quirk!" He says excitedly, eyes going wide. "If I had one, at least. Kinda wish I knew, since I'm not feeling anything."

"You're *Quirkless*?" The disbelief is evident in the way Aizawa keeps a tight grip on his cloth. "Although there is the possibility that you could perform feats without a Quirk, you are still a child nonetheless. Who trained you? Are you working for the League of Villains?"

"Shigaraki and those morons?" Deku scoffs and holds Eri close. She spots him also slightly shaking a finger at Kouta, telling him to stay where he is. "No way! They're all super weird and creepy. I'm just a Quirkless person trying to help who I can."

Something seems to come over Aizawa at that moment; his battle-ready stance shifts into something softer, and the cloth lowers. "You're being serious. So what, you run around as a vigilante and save people?"

"That's the gist of it!" Deku replies with a huge smile. "All Might told me I couldn't be a hero without a Quirk, so I figured I'd prove him wrong and help wherever I could. I swear I'm still paying attention in my studies, Eraserhead. Please don't turn me into the police."

Aizawa closes his eyes and breathes in deeply. "You're just as bad as my kids," he exhales, and at the mention of the infamous class Deku's expression falls and he looks away, working a muscle in his jaw. "And yet, here you are, helping a child escape the grips of the Shie Hassaikai once more before the Pros could step in. I wonder what else you will accomplish in the future, Deku."

Deku lets out a shaky breath.

"Leave, Problem Child." Aizawa focuses his attention on the countertop; without warning, his cloth snaps forward to snatch Kouta's leg. Kouta yelps as he gets dragged out and shouts curse words that make Eri's

ears burn. "This is how it'll work; you leave, and I don't say a single word to anyone. The next time I catch you, I'll report you to the authorities."

Even Eri knows it's an empty threat, but Deku's eyes brighten and he straightens up. "Roger that!" He cheers, and turns to both Kouta and Eri. "I gotta go, obviously, but I'll be making sure you guys are okay. Be safe, and look out for each other!" He gently smushes Kouta's hat and ruffles Eri's hair before giving Aizawa a two-fingered salute, rushing out the door.

Aizawa watches him leave and sighs, turning back to them. "I'm going to have more gray hairs," he mutters, putting a hand to his forehead. "Kouta, your aunt was wondering where you were when your excuse of 'being at a friend's house' fell through so I'll be returning you home. Eri, I'm glad you're safe and we'll work on tighter security precautions. Have you learned anything from this experience though?"

She scrunches her face to think about it, and lets the memory of his smile wash over her in a warm light. "I think I'd like to be a hero," Eri states quietly, and feels her lips tug upwards into something genuine for the first time in quite a long while.

(Hopefully it won't be the last, but only time will tell.)





Business Practices

– Iffondrel

Quiet judgement filled the room, making the sparsely decorated space feel stifling despite its openness. Cold, calculating eyes stared right through him, uncaring and unseeing. Somewhere behind him, waiting in the hallway beyond the cracked door, he could faintly make out the sound of another person shuffling nervously in anticipation. Midoriya didn't have that luxury. He stood frozen to the ground, dressed to impress while his loudly beating heart threatened to give away his internal fear. He stayed composed on the outside, same as he always did, even though he knew that it only took one mistake to end it all. But if this meeting was what he thought it was, then maybe that wouldn't be a fear for much longer.

This was a test. Everything to reach this point had been. His path had been clearly set before him the moment he'd joined Overhaul's ranks.

The yakuza boss was patient. He saw Midoriya for what he was – a lost reject seeking purpose. And that's exactly what he'd been looking for.

Overhaul dipped his plague doctor mask down until it was almost scraping against his desk. His white-gloved hands were folded in front of him, within plain view so that any witness would know that they weren't in any danger for the moment. Midoriya had only seen a few rare instances where the gloves had come off. It never ended well for the poor bastards on the receiving end of his quirk.

Today wasn't that, though. He'd been assured as much. Even still, standing in front of the boss by himself made it more difficult to breathe through the black cloth mask he wore so that Overhaul didn't have to

inhale the same dirty air as him.

Overhaul finally spoke, breaking him from the uncomfortable feeling of suspense. "You've been performing well." It was a statement, not to be confused with praise. Midoriya couldn't see it any other way. But that was good enough for him, and he stood a little straighter. "You've accomplished every task that's been given to you thus far, and your peers seem to speak highly of you." He leaned forward, and even from the distance that separated them Midoriya could see the curiosity in his eyes. "I've yet to learn much about you. A simple strength-enhancing quirk is all you have, yet you've been using it to climb the ranks. Is that it?"

He was waiting for a response. "Yes, Boss!" Midoriya answered swiftly, making sure not to stutter. That was good enough for him.

One of the boss's hands reached below the desk, reappearing with a manila folder. He pushed it to the edge of the desk. "This assignment will be the first to come directly from me. It's also the first that will take you outside our territory. Do not take it lightly."

Midoriya edged forwards cautiously until he was close enough to retrieve the folder before backing away again. Not that it would do him much good - if he did something to annoy Overhaul, then nothing could stop the yakuza from ending him. He understood that he was expendable. Accepted it, even. But he still wanted to see how far he could go in establishing himself here. If this was the only place that truly acknowledged him, then so be it.

Overhaul gave him a moment to briefly go over the documents. At a glance, it was pretty basic stuff: a drug deal where they'd be exchanging Overhaul's experimental substances for profit, located in the next city over at an abandoned factory. Midoriya had to wonder if there was a catch to all this, but it was laid out to go off without a hitch.

Overhaul let him flip through the rest of the papers before continuing. "Your partner for this mission will be Setsuno. The people you're meeting with are newer customers, but they offer a high price. If for some reason something goes wrong, just be sure that the goods aren't mishandled or lost. Do I make myself clear?"

Midoriya tucked the envelope under his arm and stood to attention. "Yes, Boss!"

"...Good. You are dismissed."

Midoriya turned quickly, leaving the room behind. He continued to feel the Boss's cold gaze follow his every step, like he could eviscerate his molecules with a look, until he was finally out the door and into the hallway. Only when the door closed behind him did he feel like he could truly breathe.

"So? How'd it go, Deku?"

"Are you excited for your mission?"

Not even a moment to relax. But it was fine, because the people waiting for him had just as much anticipation. The three yakuza that he'd left in the hall during his meeting were clamoring now, eager to know how it had went. And it so happened that they belonged to Overhaul's elite.

The Eight Bullets: Overhaul's most trusted men, serving faithfully by his side as people with no other purpose but to do everything in their power to fulfill their roles. Interestingly enough, most of them were fairly easy to get along with, or were new enough to the young boss's ranks that despite their titles they were still humble. Midoriya had often considered how easily he'd managed to transition into the yakuza, and he felt that he could safely attribute that to the quick friends he'd made.

Hojo, Tabe, and Setsuno were waiting for a response. These three stuck together more than the others, so maybe that was why Midoriya had gravitated towards them.

He smirked—not that they could see under his mask—and held up the envelope. “Got my first assignment right here!” They briefly congratulated him, leading him down the hall so that Overhaul wouldn’t have to tolerate their noise.

“You know, Setsuno, you could’ve told me we’d be on the same mission.”

The young man shrugged easily, no doubt hiding a grin of his own behind his sharply pointed mask. “Sure, sure, but where’s the fun in ruining the surprise?” He gave Midoriya a reassuring shake of the shoulder. “Don’t sweat it so much, alright? Just stick close to me and we can finish up the mission without a hitch. Who knows, this could be a good opportunity to really gain some notoriety amongst the yakuza. And you haven’t even been here very long!”

Midoriya felt a bit more emboldened by those words. “R-right!”

“You’ll want to save your strength for tonight,” Hojo mused. “It may seem like a straight-forward excursion, but anything could happen. These sorts of dealings have been getting more treacherous because of the new items that this group has been offering. That’s why lower-level members aren’t allowed to handle goods like these.”

“Oi, Hojo, stop trying to intimidate ‘im!” Tabe scolded. His voice was muffled under the bag that he used to cover his face. A bit excessive for a mask, but Midoriya had never questioned it. “We hardly ever run into any problems. This is supposed to be easy!”

Hojo grumbled something but didn’t argue. He always had reasonable

advice, though, so Midoriya wasn't about to take his warning for granted.

He held the envelope close his chest, flipping through its contents. "It's still a while before we need to leave..."

"You'll be meeting me at the northern gate, where we'll be taken immediately to our destination," Setsuno said, already fully aware of all the mission's details. "I'll be handling the package, so all you need to deal with is standing at the ready during the trade-off. If you think it's worth preparing for something as simple as that, then I ain't gonna judge. I'll be seeing you then!"

—

Midoriya spent the hours leading up to the meet-up pouring over the folder's information. But there wasn't exactly much to glean from. It was pretty simple, just like Hojo had said, he just didn't want to miss anything should it be relevant. Possible outcomes, dangers, expectations. All of it was important. By the time night fell and he made his way to the meeting place on the outskirts of Overhaul's base, he'd committed it all to memory.

Setsuno was there to greet him, briefcase clutched at his side. A small handful of standard yakuza members were there as well - their quirks weren't anything special, but they looked intimidating. If it was just him and Setsuno going in by themselves, then the people they were meeting might get the wrong idea. There was safety in numbers, so long as the group didn't become big enough to draw unwanted attention.

They piled into a black, nondescript car, where they sat tensely in quiet anticipation for the duration of the drive. Midoriya watched the night-drenched city pass through tinted windows. Setsuno's usual snarks were gone, replaced with a serious façade that was appropriate for the

situation.

It was just past midnight when they arrived at their destination—the abandoned factory that was listed in the job details. They climbed out, six total, while the driver stayed in the car with the engine running in case they needed a quick getaway. That’s when Midoriya saw the other car, tucked behind the building and away from the main roads. No sign of the people they were supposed to be meeting, though. The vehicle looked empty, and the inside of the building was dark but for a few beams of cold, luminescent light that strayed from the nearest lamp post. It made his skin crawl. But more than anything else, it made him curious. The people they were supposed to be meeting was a newer group of small-time thugs hoping to try some bigger feats in the underworld. For that reason... there was very little information about who they actually were. Nothing out of the usual, but the amount of goods they’d requested were quite pricey. He couldn’t help thinking that it was just a bit off.

Setsuno lead the way into the gaping maw of the dark facility, followed closely by the rest of the yakuza members. Midoriya stuck closer to him than anyone else, searching every shadow with suspicion.

“Glad you could make it on such short notice,” a voice echoed from the building’s depths.

Midoriya noticed the way Setsuno clutched the briefcase tighter. For a standard procedure, he seemed really guarded.

“We try not to turn down promising deals,” Setsuno responded, an edge to his voice. “Your offer is valid, right? You got the cash?”

Midoriya squinted. Two dusky figures stood near the far wall, just beyond the limited light.

One of them held up a case of their own. "Right here."

Setsuno hesitated. When the opposing figures made no move to step forward, he forged ahead instead, grumbling under his breath. Midoriya followed in his wake, dogging his heels anxiously. In such an unknown environment, one could never be too sure about what would happen. But looking around, he couldn't sense anyone other than the people standing within sight. From here, the sounds of the city melt muffled, the touch of the outer world distant. All that existed in the moment was this exchange. And then it'd be over, their mission complete, and time on the outside would resume the same as it'd always been.

So then why does it feel so hard to breathe?

After crossing the length of the factory, the car that had brought them here felt so far away. But that hardly mattered now—their customers were standing right in front of them.

Midoriya tried to get a look at their faces. Dark eyes bordered by dark clothes. It was hard to focus in on any details in the low light. Maybe their shoes looked a bit too new for common street thugs, or the way they stood stiffly was a bit off. Overhaul would've said that the underworld is filled with all types of people, though. What was Midoriya supposed to know, stepping into this new layer of darkness for the first time? So instead he watched closely from behind Setsuno's back, waiting for anything to happen, and in his mind he replayed all the possible scenarios that could take place in this desolate territory.

When they were face to face, the person holding the briefcase of cash spoke first. "Can we trust that what you have is the real deal?" he asked, nodding to the delivery in Setsuno's hands.

"We have a reputation to keep up," Setsuno sneered. "On our Boss's behalf, we order exactly what we're asked to and you'll be damn happy

to have it! So that's why you go first, since you're new on the block." The two figures looked to each other uncertainly. Setsuno tapped the tip of his mask to bring their attention back to him. "Well? I'm waiting."

Under his demands, they opened their briefcase, revealing a large sum of cash. Proving that it was all there - no tricks or fake bills - they closed it and handed it promptly to Setsuno, who in turn passed it back to one of the yakuza behind him. Then he opened his own case to reveal what all that money had been good for - an impressive five bottles of experimental Trigger serum.

"This is what you wanted, right? Just know that you should count yourself lucky to have gotten an audience with us. Too many fake dealers out there, trying to have what we have," Setsuno boasted, handing the case of Trigger over to them. "It's been a pleasure doing business with you."

"So this is the real deal..." one of them mused. The tone felt off somehow, and Midoriya just barely managed to suppress the shudder that threatened to rattle him.

"Then that's all we needed. Rest assured, the pleasure was ours." When the dark-clothed figure shut the lid on the case of drugs, that's when Midoriya felt it.

Movement. Coming at them from all sides.

Something shot out of the shadows, a thick tendril lined with twitching bug legs that grabbed hold of one of their men and dragged him screaming out from their ranks. From the other side of the factory, water shot of nowhere, blasting two more of their guys to the ground. Before Midoriya had even been given time to process what was happening, their group had been nearly halved.

Luckily for him, Setsuno was quicker to react. "We were set up! Don't let them get you!"

Another one of the strange arms surged towards him from behind a stack of boxes, and in the low light Midoriya managed to make out the silhouette of a hulking, bug-faced man.

He dodged to the side, the power of his quirk flowing through him. All around him, his fellow yakuza dropped to the will of the undercover heroes.

Setsuno was quick to react. One of the dark-clad figures cried out as the yakuza lashed out with his knife. The thief put his quirk to good use, disarming his opponents and snatching the Trigger case back from them. "Focus on escape!" he barked, dashing back where they came. There was only one exit, though, and in an ambush scenario Midoriya imagined they were already surrounded. He couldn't count how many heroes had infiltrated the area – it looked like only a few, but one kept jumping around at impossible speeds, appearing one moment and vanishing the next.

He needed a diversion.

Midoriya crackled with green energy, and for a split moment he concentrated as much of it as he could physically handle in his right arm. He could feel his bones creaking with the exertion. But he knew himself better now than he did before, when he'd first gotten this power. The force traveled through his shoulder, then his arm, and finally in his fist.

"Smash!"

The air warped around him, and the ground shifted beneath him with the force of the shockwave that left his fist. The attack shook the very

foundation of the already structurally unsound building, and scraps of roofing fell from above. Old boxes toppled and the whole area vibrated with the effects of his monstrous ability.

Midoriya grabbed ahold of Setsuno, wrapping an arm around his midriff. As much as he didn't want to leave the others behind, they'd been left in a compromised state. Overhaul would understand... he hoped. He channeled the immense energy coursing through him into his legs, focusing on speed over brute strength. He was vaguely aware of his ally letting out a surprised wheeze before they were briskly rushed out of the building. Midoriya hadn't exactly been given time to give Setsuno a warning. So long as he kept a firm hold of that briefcase, it should be fine.

The factory door's threshold passed by them, Midoriya racing away from the scene for all he was worth. Despite his speed, he caught sight of something that appeared suddenly out of the corner of his eye - a flash of a red cape, followed by an equally fast movement—a punch. Without much time to react, a golden-clad hero with beady, determined eyes had snuck up on them.

How annoying.

It was nothing he couldn't deal with. If anything, he admired the hero's tenacity. But he wouldn't hold back here. Not when Overhaul was relying on him. This mission had already gone horribly wrong—he wouldn't allow it to be an absolute failure. That'd be a stain on the Shie Hassaikai's reputation.

Without pausing his momentum, Midoriya pushed off the ground and dodged the fist that had been aimed at him. Setsuno—the poor bastard—continued to be dragged closely to his side, and together they evaded the hero. The earth cratered beneath him, and he watched the hero falter for a mere second. That was all Midoriya needed. With that, he

he pushed away with all he had, leaving the turmoil behind.

City roads sped past him, each frenzied sprint bringing him farther from that place. As much as he hated to admit it, that hero probably would've been pretty adept at pursuing him. For whatever reason, though, they were able to flee unopposed.

Midoriya wasn't sure how long he'd been running, or how much distance had been made, but after a while Setsuno finally managed to get a few strangled words out. "Put... me... down!"

The energy dissipated around him, until it was thin trails that dwindled away to nothing. Midoriya felt a brief wave of exhaustion rush over him before stubbornly shaking it off. They'd found themselves in a quiet side street, away from the main bustle of the city. Following Setsuno's order, he put the man down.

"Ah! S-sorry, it was the only way I could think to get out," Midoriya stammered.

Setsuno released a heavy sigh. "No, you did the right thing." He'd lost his mask during their escape. That meant that Midoriya could see the full extent of the disgusted expression on Setsuno's face. But at least he'd managed to keep his hold on the briefcase of drugs. Even now, he didn't set it down, keeping a firm grasp while he used his other hand to fish out a phone from his pocket. "I just... *shit*, why didn't I see how suspicious that whole thing was?! Ahhh, the Boss is gonna be *pissed*."

Now that the action was over, Midoriya was starting to recognize just how badly this whole event had gone. Despite his quick actions and the confidence he had in his power, he felt himself deflating. "Y...you really think so?" Thoughts ran rampant in his mind: *could* he have done better? Should he have defeated those heroes? Maybe he could've fought harder so that more of their fellow yakuza had a chance to

escape. Instead, it was just the two of them. Hell, even the car they'd arrived in was probably in hero custody now.

Setsuno looked up sharply, only to be met with the look of worried disappointment that was plaguing Midoriya. He lowered the phone. "Hey, don't sweat it too much. Sometimes missions are a bust, and all we can do is try to anticipate them. Or in this case, get out before it gets worse than we can handle. That's what we did, right? We still have the goods, too. Yeah, this was a bad first mission, but knowing Overhaul there'll be plenty more for you in the future."

Midoriya adjusted his tie. He couldn't tell if the member of the Eight Bullets was trying to be nice in the face of failure or if that was the truth. It was most likely the latter, but doubt still wormed its way into him. "I hope you're right," he mumbled sheepishly.

"Of course I am," Setsuno huffed. "I'll file a full report, so don't bother with the details. Next time for sure, we won't disappoint. You want to keep proving yourself to the boss, right Deku?"

Midoriya thought about that hero that had appeared beside him, retaliating against everything he'd set out to make for himself. He couldn't imagine that world of heroics. Not anymore.

He clutched his fists determinedly. "Right."



Welcome to Naruhata!

– vannahfanfics

Izuku's body jostled left and right with the bumping of the overcrowded city bus. Most people would focus on the uncomfortable position he was in, crammed between a sweaty jock and an elderly woman who smelled potently of mothballs, but Izuku's mind was far away from the humdrum of city commuting. As one hand grasped the silver handlebar above his head, the other held his cell phone sideways, full-screening the grainy video dramatically titled '*Naruhata Vigilante Thwarts a Kidnapping Attempt!*'

Izuku's emerald eyes sparkled. A giddy smile brightened his freckled face as he rapturously watched the hoodie-donned vigilante zoom across the concrete and puncture the tires of a getaway vehicle with high-velocity discharges of his Quirk.

"Wow! His Quirk is so simple, but he refined his skills to create a unique ultimate move! Simply extraordinary!" he whispered admiringly.

High-pitched squeaks of elation bubbled out of Izuku's mouth, despite his best efforts to suppress them by worrying his bottom lip with his teeth. Aided by another local vigilante, a pink-haired girl in a pop-star styled costume, the masked man managed to subdue the villain and safely deliver the frightened teenage girl to helpful bystanders. They disappeared into the alleyways right as the police and the professional heroes rolled on the scene.

"Ah!" Izuku exclaimed aloud as the video ended. "So cool! I hope I can find him—*The Crawler!*"

Most people idolized heroes like All Might or Endeavor, but for the last five years, Izuku's devotion belonged to a local vigilante known as the Crawler. Vigilantism was criminalized in the current hero society, but Izuku just couldn't *help* but admire him. The man pursued hero work without a license or agreement with the government, simply because he wanted to do good.

It gave Izuku hope that he could do that too, even without a Quirk.

The bus slowly trundled to a stop. As the driver loudly called that they'd arrived at Naruhata, Izuku squeaked and nearly dropped his phone in alarm. As the spastic boy bundled up his book bag and scurried down the packed aisle with high-pitched *excuse me's* and *sorry's*, he grinned breathlessly.

This is it!

Izuku's breaths came in little pants as he hopped down the bus steps and onto the sidewalk. He clutched the straps of his book bag tightly as he surveyed the surrounding area. He'd studied a city map and the many videos of The Crawler's stomping grounds to nauseating detail, but the guy had evaded law enforcement for years now. Izuku wasn't gonna find him just meandering around. Still, Izuku wasn't one to be deterred. He sucked in a breath and stomped off, the tongues of his bright red sneakers flapping with every determined step.

Finding a man who didn't want to be found proved easier said than done. Izuku slunk through the backstreets of Naruhata, eyes peeled for any sign of his hero. Izuku found plenty of silver trash bins, skinny gray strays, and unconscious drunkards, but there was no sign of the Crawler. As the hunt dragged on, Izuku's hopes began to dwindle bit by bit.

"Come on, Izuku!" he encouraged himself quietly and squeezed the straps of his backpack. "I just have to keep looking!" He tried his best to

keep the pep in his step as he rounded the corner to another alleyway. He brightened when he spotted humanoid shadows dancing in its depths.

Could it be?

"H-hello?" he called as he pushed himself up on his tip-toes to peer above the grimy surface of an olive green dumpster. Izuku's smile dissolved as a hulking form rose over the rim of the trash receptacle. The muscle-bound man glowering angrily at him definitely was not the vigilante he'd been searching for. Based on the plastic bag of bright white powder swinging from the stranger's calloused hands, Izuku had interrupted a meeting of quite the unsavory type.

"S-s-s-sorry, fellas!" Izuku stammered as he took a tentative step backward. His knuckles wrapped around the backpack straps glared ghostly white in the gloom to match the paling shade of his face. "I, um, sorry to interrupt– I'll just be going now!"

As he whirled on his heels, Izuku felt the cold shadow of the gigantic man descend over him. He squeaked as all of his hair stood on end. Before he could run, a large hand latched onto his backpack. Izuku whimpered as he was dragged backward, the soles of his shoes scraping against the pavement.

Izuku shrunk into himself as he was lifted off the ground, dangling from his backpack as the large drug dealer inspected him critically.

"Takin' a field trip, shrimp?" the man guffawed, punctuating the question by shaking Izuku's book bag back and forth. Izuku released a stream of sniffles and whimpers as his body jostled roughly.

Stay calm! I gotta stay calm! I can't ever be a hero if I panic like this! Yet, it was nearly impossible to think clearly when he was being suspended

six feet in the air by a hulking monstrosity of a villain. Izuku gulped loudly as the man sneered to reveal several silver and gold teeth.

Izuku's emerald eyes rolled in their sockets as he frantically searched for something, *anything*, that he could use to save himself. When nothing useful appeared in the vicinity, Izuku resorted to the first instinct that came to mind— flailing his feet and fists against the man's chest.

The villain's eyes darkened. *Wrong move! Very wrong move!*

With a frightened gasp, Izuku ceased thrashing about and gawked at the man helplessly. A sickeningly gleeful smile spread across the man's face, distorting his visage with bloodlust. As the villain curled his fist in preparation to crush Izuku's skull in, the young boy flinched and wrapped his arms around his head.

The expected blow never came. Instead, Izuku heard the man exclaim breathily and felt his grip loosen from his book bag. Izuku squealed and flapped his limbs as he suddenly dropped into the open air. He cracked his eyes open to see the grimy cobblestone rushing up to meet him.

Before he could prepare himself for a rough landing, he plopped down into two arms covered with a soft cotton blue, red, and gold-patterned hoodie. Izuku reflexively gripped onto the shoulders of his savior as they zipped him speedily to the back end of the alley to safely deposit him among some mildewy newspapers.

"Phew! Now that's what I call a close one," grinned the jacket-clad man. Izuku just gaped senselessly as the man flicked his dark bangs out of his sapphire-blue eyes to pout at the disgruntled villain. "Haven't ya ever heard the saying 'pick on someone your own size'?" Izuku said nothing, vibrating with the aftershocks of fear blending into excitement.

It's him! It's really him—The Crawler!

As Izuku struggled to form a coherent thought, the villain began lumbering towards them. The alley floor quaked with each of his thundering steps, and his shadow stretched long to envelop Izuku and the crouching vigilante.

"Whoops. You look angry," the Crawler chortled nervously. Izuku squeaked as he was unceremoniously bundled into his arms again. "Gotta fly!" Izuku latched onto his hoodie's fabric as the man abruptly zipped up the nearby wall using his Quirk. Over the rushing of the wind in his ears, Izuku heard the man violently swear that it wasn't over.

They zig-zagged across the roofs of a few buildings, with the vigilante occasionally using boosts of his Quirk to vault them across the wide gaps. When they landed on the flat top of a doctor's office, the underground hero finally slowed and gently set Izuku down. Izuku's knees, still knocking together, failed to hold his weight, so he just bonelessly slid down onto the tarred roofing. As the Crawler pulled down the mask eclipsing the bottom half of his face, he flashed Izuku a piteous smile.

"I'm sure that wasn't the warm welcome you were expecting, huh, kid?"

Izuku blinked stupidly. His frazzled brain was still struggling to piece together the rapid series of events that had landed him *here*, right in front of his hero. The vigilante ignored him to turn to the edge of the building, where a pink-haired girl in a sparkly outfit hopped into view.

"Koichi! Why'd you run away? We totally coulda taken that guy!" She gave a disdainful sniff and dug her fists into her hips. *Koichi...* Izuku echoed, starstruck.

Koichi gave the girl a bashful smile.

"C'mon, Pop. I didn't want the kid to get hurt, okay?"

Pop☆Step narrowed her magenta eyebrows suspiciously at Izuku.

"Sure," she huffed with a shake of her head. "You okay, kid? You look pretty spooked."

No! Izuku refuted. He bit down on his lip hard enough for blood to bead beneath his canine, and the stimulation of pain finally managed to snap his brain out of overdrive. *I can't look weak now! If I do, then he'll never...!*

"I'm just fine!" Izuku insisted. To emphasize, he pushed himself to his feet. Though his knees still trembled, they managed to bear his weight this time. Slightly elated with himself, he whirled around to face Koichi, whose eyes widened in surprise. "Never mind that! You're him! You're The Crawler!"

An ecstatic grin split Koichi's face.

"Pop! Pop, didja hear that? He knows who I am! And he's not callin' me somethin' dumb like the Cruller!"

"Of course not!" Izuku said. His emerald eyes sparkled with delight as he stepped closer to Koichi, rapidly finding his confidence. "I'm a huge fan of yours! I've been following your exploits ever since you debuted!"

"Really? Oh wow, I've never had an avid fan like you before!" Koichi gushed while rubbing the back of his neck. Pop☆Step, who had come to stand beside the taller man, rolled her eyes with a sniff and propped her elbow on Koichi's shoulder.

"Please! Mr. Crawler, sir! Please make me your sidekick!"

"What?" Koichi and Pop☆Step exclaimed simultaneously, mouths gaping.

"Please! I respect you so much, Mr. Crawler, sir! You're everything I could ever want to be as a hero! You do what you think is right, and I think that's so honorable, sir! Please! I want to be just like you! I'm Quirkless, I'll admit, but I'll work really hard to make up for that! Please, sir, I know I can—"

Izuku was interrupted by Koichi slapping his palm over his mouth. It took him a moment to register that it had even happened, his continued babbling muffled by the vigilante's glove. Koichi watched him calm down with a stony expression.

"You done?" he asked when Izuku had finally stopped talking. Izuku nodded slowly with wide eyes. He kept his lips pressed shut as Koichi slowly dropped his hand from his mouth, though the temptation to resume prattling was *oh* so very strong. Koichi released a deep sigh, a complicated look appearing on his face as he rubbed the back of his neck again.

"A sidekick, huh?" he whispered thoughtfully. Pop☆Step gasped and rounded on him indignantly.

"*Koichi!* You can't possibly be considering this! He's just a kid, and on top of that, he's *Quirkless*."

Though they were all oppositions he knew he'd hear, her adamant tone still made Izuku shrink in on himself. Tears welled up in the corners of his eyes, and his bottom lip quivered as he struggled to keep them from rolling down his freckled cheeks. Koichi's blue eyes slid to him, widening with concern.

"Oh, come on, Pop," Koichi frowned with a nod towards Izuku. She looked in his direction and then hung her head with a groan. Izuku brightened slightly, hoping her reaction meant she would cease opposition.

"I don't know, Koichi," she said uncertainly. "He's just a *kid*."

"Pop, we were just kids when we started out," Koichi argued with raised eyebrows. Her cheeks flushed as she was dealt a stunning rebuttal. She crossed her arms with a huff.

"Okay! But we have Quirks. This kid doesn't."

"So? Who says you need a Quirk to do the right thing, Pop? Train him to fight and maybe find him some good Support items, and he could *be* something! You don't have the right to deny his potential just because he's Quirkless," Koichi argued vehemently. Pop☆Step and Izuku both flinched at the scowl disfiguring his otherwise amicable person.

The tears spilled over the brim of Izuku's eyes because, for the first time in his life, someone still took him seriously even though he was Quirkless.

Izuku sunk down into a crouch with a small groan. He sniffed, rubbing furiously at his eyes, trying to stop the steady flow of tears. Though he was mortified to cry in front of Koichi, Izuku just couldn't help it. It felt so damn good to be told he had *potential*.

"I-I-I'm sorry," he stammered between sobs. "I-I just... No one's... Ever since I was told I was Quirkless, everyone g-g-gave up on me... To hear you say... I c-c-c-can be a h-h-h-hero... *it means so much to me!*"

Through his tears, Izuku could see Koichi smile kindly. Pop☆Step still looked a little unsure, but she elected to stay silent as Koichi knelt to lay a hand on Izuku's shoulder.

"Hey, kid. What's your name?"

"I-I-Izuku," he sniffed while sucking in breaths to try and quiet his sobs.

"Izuku Midoriya." Koichi's smile widened, and he patted Izuku's shoulders a couple times.

"Well, Izuku—"

"There you are!"

They sprang apart as a voice thundered from the rooftop door. A white table came flying across the roof. Izuku gasped as it plowed right into Koichi and Pop☆Step, sending them hurtling backward. Koichi took the brunt of the blow; the table splintered as it slammed into him, and Izuku could only watch in horror as he was launched right over the edge of the building.

Pop☆Step landed roughly against the bricks rimming the roof, teetering precariously close to the edge with a gaping gash in her forehead. She remained motionless; she'd been knocked unconscious by the assault.

"Hehehe," the villain cackled as he approached, cracking his knuckles. Each snap of his joints sent shivers down Izuku's spine. "No wonder you ran away. That's all it takes? And they call you the heroes of Naruhata." The man stopped a few paces in front of the stunned Izuku. "Oh, look. It's the little punk."

What do I do? What do I do? Izuku panicked, wild-eyed and sweating bullets in the face of such malice. His eyes slid behind him to Pop☆Step. *I gotta protect her!* His eyes snapped around for something of use, eventually landing on a thin piece of metal. It was a leg of the table that had bent and snapped off at the end. Hurriedly, Izuku scrambled over and snatched it up.

"Stay back! I'm warning you! I won't let you hurt her!" Izuku growled as he jumped up and brandished the sharp piece of metal. The villain looked at him amusedly.

"Oh-ho-ho, the punk's getting brave now, huh?" he sneered. Izuku balked as the man cracked his neck before stalking towards him. "Let's see how brave you are when I show you *this*."

Izuku paled as dark, coarse hair sprouted from the man's skin, which stretched over bulging muscles. Bone tusks sprang from his mouth as his face morphed into a rendition of a boar's head. When the man opened his mouth, a high-pitched, squeal-like roar bellowed forth, spraying thick globs of spittle across the tar. Izuku gulped loudly but stood his ground.

Now's my chance. I can do this. I can be strong!

As the man lunged at him with lightning speed, Izuku just barely managed to stumble to the side. Relying on adrenaline and his reflexes, Izuku twirled the iron spear in his hand and jabbed it into the meat of the man's thigh. Another piggish squeal erupted from the villain's mouth, this time laced with agony. Blood spurted from the wound as Izuku yanked the sharp metal out. As the villain pressed his hands into the puncture, trying to suppress the blood gushing from his leg, Izuku scurried over to Pop☆Step and picked her up.

"Koichi..." she murmured groggily. Izuku supported her weight with his body as he dragged her towards the exit, still brandishing the stick at the boar villain.

"I'm gonna kill you, you little runt!" Though he was slipping in his own blood, rage had blinded the villain, making him charge Izuku again. The loss of blood had slowed him significantly, however. Izuku allowed Pop☆Step to slither to the ground so he could grip the iron in both hands. As the villain bore down upon him, Izuku did not shy away; with a yowl, he swung the iron with all his might to clock the villain in the side of the head.

The force of the blow sent him lurching sideways. A low groan bubbled from his lips as he wobbled, then slumped to the ground. "You... little..." His words trailed off as he landed face-down against the roof. Chest heaving, Izuku held the iron aloft for a few seconds just in case the villain roused.

He didn't move. Izuku slowly lowered the bar. He then loosened his fingers, letting the metal drop. It clattered at his feet, splattering blood over his already crimson shoes.

"I did it... I actually did it..."

"Izuku! Pop!"

Izuku looked up to see the Koichi limping over with bits of trash sticking to his clothes and a big ugly purple-black bruise decorating a swollen eye. When he noticed the unconscious villain slumped at Izuku's feet, he stopped and pointed with wide eyes.

"Did you do that?"

"I did..." Izuku whispered, looking down at his hands. Rust from the pipe dusted his palms with orange flakes. He flexed his fingers, closing his hands into fists as a giddy smile spread over his face. "I did!"

The vigilante smiled amusedly and resumed limping over so he could affectionately tousle Izuku's pine-green hair.

"Not bad. Though, he's bleeding a lot..."

"Oh my gosh! Did I kill him? I'm not supposed to do that! Oh my gosh! I'm too young to go to jail!" Izuku panicked, slapping his hands to his cheeks as his irises shrunk into the white sea of his eyes. Koichi laughed heartily.

"I'm kidding; I'm kidding. He'll be alright. Pop, are you okay?" Koichi asked as Pop☆Step used Izuku's shoulder to drag herself into a standing position.

"Ugh... I have a headache..." Pop☆Step groaned, pressing her hand to her bleeding forehead. Koichi shuffled over to give her a thorough once-over before turning back to Izuku, who was still staring fearfully at the subdued villain.

"That took guts, Izuku."

When Izuku turned, Koichi was smiling warmly at him. "You protected Pop and took down that guy all by yourself. I'm impressed." As Koichi's smile widened, hope fluttered in Izuku's chest.

"Do... Do you mean...?"

"Yep!" Koichi grinned. "Welcome to the gang, kid! Wow, my first ever sidekick. I'm so excited."

Izuku was excited, too, and he showed it by jumping forward to envelop Koichi in a crushing hug.

"Thank you so much, Mr. Crawler, sir! I'll do my best! I promise!"

"Ack! First, just call me Koichi. Second, not so tight, I think I broke a rib or two," Koichi coughed. With a gasp, Izuku jerked away, watching as Koichi sagged and clutched his side with a weak smile.

"Hey!"

"Oh, what *now*?" Pop☆Step whined and whirled on her heel just in time to see a black-clad, disheveled-looking man using some strange tape to swing onto the roof. Koichi's face split into a cheesy grin again.

"Oh, hey, Eraser!"

"You're friends with *Eraserhead*?" Izuku whispered, gawking shamelessly at the professional hero as he strode over with a disinterested look. He planted his boot on the villain's back with a displeased grunt.

"Causing trouble again, I see. Hold on. This one's new." Eraserhead frowned with a point at Izuku. While the green-haired boy cringed, Koichi snickered satisfactorily and jerked Izuku into his side.

"Yup! This is my new sidekick."

"Oh, no. I already turn a blind eye to all your nonsense. Now you're corrupting kids? I'm taking you in for real this time."

"What's that? Someone calling for help? Sorry, Eraser, gotta run! I trust you'll take care of this for us, yeah?" Koichi sniggered. Before Eraserhead could react, he grabbed onto Izuku's school uniform and dropped down to zoom off, with Pop springing along behind him with airy giggles.

"Hey! Get back here—oh, *forget it*." Izuku heard Eraserhead grumble as he was whisked away. A breathless feeling overtook him, but not because the wind had stolen it away.

This is it! I'm gonna be training under my idol as a hero!

No... as a vigilante!



His Own Way

– Lucy

He didn't regret it.

Not the lies, not the fights, not the obvious obstruction of law.

Since he was a child they told him that he could never be what he dreamt of being, that someone without a quirk could never become a hero. What was he going to fight with? His fists and his wits against monsters and murderers? Get real kid, become a police officer or something. Give up on useless dreams.

But now the name Wild Hare was on everyone's lips.

And he was here, sitting in an interrogation room. Charged for doing what they told him he couldn't in the first place.

He didn't regret it.

He didn't think he ever would.

In the last few months acting as a vigilante, Izuku helped more people than he could count. From little old ladies that just needed someone to carry their grocery bags to minor villains that simply weren't prioritized by heroes next to larger treats. In the end, fists and wits really were all he needed. Fists, wits, a mind hungry for knowledge, decently skilled hands and a few underground DIY videos that told him how to make his own equipment.

He was proud. Proud that he managed to do the impossible.

The only thing he regretted was the look on his mother's face when the police came to their door to lead him away. The tears welling in her eyes and spilling down her cheeks as she tried to pull the officers back, tried to get them to let him go. Tried to convince them that there was no way her son, her well behaved, straight A, quirkless son, was a vigilante.

The look of shock on her face when he told her that it was okay, to let the officers do their job, would forever stay engraved in his mind.

And now he was stuck here, in this stark white interrogation room, with cameras pointed at him from every angle. His hand was handcuffed to the table, the mirror on his side was definitely one way and he wondered if all interrogation rooms look like they came straight from movies.

The chair was nailed to the ground so he couldn't tip himself back. He just had to satisfy himself by knocking his head over it's top. He hated waiting. Especially when he didn't know what he was waiting for.

And then, the door opened.

"Thank you so much officers! Do not worry, I will talk some good sense into this young man! Leave it to me!"

All Might's hulking form filled the doorway as the officers nodded along and wished him good luck.

Izuku couldn't quite look him in the eyes once that brilliant smile turned towards him. Something slippery and traitorous rolled around his stomach. All Might used to be his biggest idol. Now one look at his face made Izuku sick.

Really, if he was less self-aware he would have said that it was All Might's fault that he ended up here.

But he knew far too well that this was the path he had chosen for himself. Right or wrong, it was his choice alone.

All Might was just the catalyst.

"My boy..." All Might shrunk down to that emancipated, skeletal form Izuku saw on that fateful day. Izuku's eyes quickly darted towards the camera in the corner, but All Might raised his hand, shaking his head, "It's alright, I asked them not to record or look at us during this talk. We are alone."

Izuku lifted his eyebrow. "You can do that?"

"They trust me a lot."

Of course they did, it was All Might after all. Once upon a time, Izuku put all of his trust into him too. It was startling to see how weak the man really was when he needed him the most. Just as startling as it was to see him in this form again, looking like a shadow chasing death.

"My boy—"

"I won't stop."

That startled All Might enough that he stopped mid-sentence and Izuku straightened up, looking his idol in the eyes. "I won't stop doing this. I know that's what you are here to tell me. To quit this, go back home, be a good kid. Become a cop or a lawyer or something. Live within my limits, I've heard it all."

All Might opened his mouth again but Izuku didn't want to hear the rejection a second time. Without even really realizing it he pushed himself out of the chair, the handcuff straining against his wrist as he firmly held All Might's gaze. "That's all fine and good but I don't want

that. I never wanted that. I'm not doing it for money or fame, I don't care if no one ever recognizes me, I don't care if I have to rebrand every time I'm arrested. I'm helping people out there, people *you*—" All Might flinched, "don't get to in time. Yeah it might be one person a day and I might not have the power to make a huge difference, but I don't care. For that one person I changed their day considerably, made them feel safer, protected them. That's all I care about. I won't stop this while there are people out there that need my help. You can't make me."

"And I'm not going to," All Might finally managed to cut in, raising his hands up in a placating motion.

That was a surprise. Izuku fixed All Might with a suspicious glare, but the man seemed to be genuine. He let the staring contest last a moment more, before sighing and sitting down.

"You won't? Then why are you here, if not to tell me to quit?"

"Well..." All Might flexed his fingers over the table, looking down at them like he was weighing his words instead of carelessly throwing them out like he did the first time they met, "I suppose what I wanted to say is that I admire you."

Izuku felt like he got slapped. He stared at All Might unblinkingly for what must have been far more than normal because All Might started to look visibly uncomfortable. But Izuku couldn't even manage a normal human response because his mind was reeling. All Might was his idol since he was a child. Even when he got rejected by him, even when he turned his back to everything All Might represented, that childish admiration still smoldered in the back of his heart no matter how much disillusion tried to drown it out.

It was surreal to hear that All Might admired *him*.

"You see my boy," All Might broke the awkward silence, "I don't think I would have ever been able to do what you did. I was born without a quirk too and if I hadn't been gifted with one by my mentor... I don't think I would have become a hero."

He looked at Izuku with that kind smile that somehow looked more genuine on this gaunt, exhausted man, then it ever was on the face of a Goliath such as All Might.

"But you didn't give up, you made your own way. There is... something to be said about legality of what you did but you stuck to your guns... even after what I told you. That takes courage my boy."

Those blue eyes pinned Izuku to the spot with their intensity.

"That takes courage and the spirit of a true hero. That's what I admire about you. When the world told you... when I told you to sit back, you marched forward and you did good you knew you were capable of. I think that a lot of heroes would benefit from having a spirit like yours."

Knots formed in Izuku's throat and he felt hot tears sting at his eyes. He did his best to blink them away but he couldn't get rid of the warmth in his cheeks. He never thought he would hear something like that. Hear All Might of all people tell him something so kind and accepting. Even though he knew he was in big trouble, warmth still spread through Izuku's chest. Warmth he so desperately craved but always had trouble finding.

Still, something didn't make sense and Izuku bit his lip before looking up at All Might. "What do you mean, you were born without a quirk? You –you are All Might."

All Might smiled depreciatively, looking over the room before leaning across the table, his voice quiet as he spoke. "My quirk you see, how to

explain it now... it can be passed on, from one person to the next. It is a quirk that builds power as it's passed along. I was born without a quirk, but my mentor gifted me hers... she had no reason to believe in me, young and idealistic as I was. She could have given her quirk to another strong hero, she knew plenty... but she gave it to me. She saw something in me, something I desperately wanted to prove, and she gave me a chance."

Izuku couldn't believe what he was hearing, couldn't connect the idea of All Might, *the* All Might, being a helpless quirkless kid like him. Someone as amazing as All Might, coming to existence not out of inborn strength but out of a chance someone took on him. Out of trust he was shown. Izuku slumped in his seat. It was almost too much to take.

"So then..."

"I wish...I had done as my mentor did back then...I wish I took a chance on you," All Might sighed, twisting his fists together, "She looked close and saw in me exactly what the world needed. I dismissed you at a glance. I saw a frail child... I didn't see the brave, selfless spirit that you have. I wish I still had my quirk, so I could pass it on to you. I know you would do great things with it. I can see it in your eyes now, when I remember what I'm supposed to be looking for... but I have passed it on already. Hah...Nighteye had a perfect candidate at the ready and I'm sure young Togata will do amazingly with my quirk but... he would have been an amazing hero without it too. It was you who needed that chance, needed that push and I denied it to you."

"Wait just a second." Izuku cut in. He didn't want to be rude but All Might really seemed to be winding himself up for a speech and honestly, Izuku didn't like where it was going.

"I don't want it."

"Excuse me?" All Might's voice was hesitant as he looked at Izuku.

"The quirk, even if this Togata guy wanted to give it to me. I don't want it."

All Might stared at him, his mouth slightly agape, flexing his fingers as if trying to grasp the meaning of Izuku's words in his hands. "My boy?"

"Not that I don't appreciate the opportunity... or the thought," Izuku laughed weakly. "It's an honor to be considered for something like this, I mean to be the next All Might, wow..." He shook his head and leaned back in his chair. "But no, I don't need it."

He thought he did. Not a few months ago while he lived side by side with aspiring heroes and genius quirks. He thought the only way to catch up to them would be to have a quirk of his own. That would be the only way to play on the same field as them.

But they were still in school and he was already an accomplished rescuer.

"Having a quirk is great, I believe that. Not having a quirk... makes you different, makes you *other*. People don't really like... different. They are used to heroes with quirks so heroes without quirks are impossible to imagine. But I did that already."

He looked up at All Might, his eyes blazing with determination. He might have just imagined the twitch of pride in All Might's face.

"I'm a hero already... well a vigilante, but I'm helping people. I helped so many people already. Without a quirk. Without any help. I mean, if there is anything I want it would be a hero license. It would be nice to be able to do my job and not get arrested," he chuckled sheepishly, "But a quirk... that isn't something I need to be a hero... I never needed it."

"I am already a hero, quirk or not. If the world isn't ready for me to be a legal hero, I'll continue being a vigilante. That is on the world, not on me. I know who I am, I know what I can do, and I'll keep doing it no matter what others say."

A small smile was present on All Might's face, barely a shadow of the bright grin he wore in his powered up form. But this one somehow meant to Izuku now as much as that bright grin meant to him when he was a child. When he was a child that smile said: 'You are safe, I'll take care of things.' The smile All Might wore now clearly said: 'You can do this on your own and I'm proud of that.'

Izuku's hands trembled.

It was more than he could have ever asked for.

"Of course my boy, you are right. You've proven yourself more than enough," All Might said, once again looking towards the cameras, though this time he didn't lean in to whisper, "I'll put in a good word for you. Technically all of your obstructions of justice can be reduced to helping heroes catch villains so I doubt you will get much more than community service. I know you want to go back to your work as soon as possible. But once you've repaid your debt to society, I would like you to come find me first. I'll have a preposition for you."

"I said—"

"That you don't want a quirk, I know, I know. That's not what I was going to suggest," All Might said, waving his hands in defense, "I was just going to ask... you've heard of UA, right young Midoriya?"

"Of course." Izuku blinked at him. How could he have not heard of one of the most famous hero schools in the country?

"Right, of course, right. Well, how would you like to attend it?"

That caught Izuku by surprise. He stared at All Might in disbelief, feeling himself just blink at him owlishly. He wasn't completely sure that he didn't mishear. Him? In UA?

"I... I need a quirk to even be considered for the exam."

"Well, usually, yes. But I would be willing to send you in with my recommendations and well... I know a teacher there who I think would be quite interested in training someone who doesn't exactly fit the hero bill to a T." All Might chuckled softly, looking at Izuku's slack jawed expression.

"I could be a hero..."

"A licensed one, yes."

Izuku gulped, scrubbing at his face as it grew hot with upcoming tears. He had always been quick to cry and something like this was completely overwhelming. He couldn't believe it. His childhood dream was in reach. He did it his way and still he was being recognized for his hard work instead of being scolded for the path he took to show it.

"Thank you."

All Might smiled. "I only saw the potential of what you can be and acted on it. You are the one who did everything."

Izuku nodded, biting his lip, feeling like if he opened his mouth to speak he would actually burst into tears.

"It will be hard work, my boy. You did plenty on the streets, but UA has its own curriculum and it won't take it easy on you just because you

don't have a quirk. You have the right mindset, a good heart, but you will have to work fifty times harder to keep up with the rest of your classmates."

Izuku nodded and clenched his fists. When he looked up, the glow of determination in his eyes was warm and familiar to All Might.

"I won't let you down. I'll become the greatest hero you've ever seen."

"My boy, you already are."



The Gasoline Befriends the Match

– Taro

Izuku Midoriya is a patient teen. He isn't sure if that's one of the few traits that he managed to inherit from his mother, or if it's a by-product of waiting desperately for news that would never come for year after year after year. The boy *can* be certain, however, that it is one of the traits he did not receive from his father.

It's not hard to see the resemblances when you know that it's there. It's in Izuku's eyes, too round and open to be linked at first glance but with a trademark fire burning behind them that gives it away. A jaw that sets too square too often, the self-righteous anger that bubbles up within him and always overflows in the worst possible moments. The truly perceptive might even pick up on the way that they both share a distaste for the number one hero but they wouldn't live long past mentioning it.

It's almost funny now thinking about how they must have looked when Izuku finally met the man, rage and disappointment echoing off each other and growing in intensity with every word exchanged. Even funnier to wonder how it had taken him over a decade to put the pieces together when it had never been that complex of a puzzle to begin with.

"You know," The voice is gruff, but not unkind, as the door closes behind Izuku. "We don't have to do this if you're having second thoughts." The boy next to him is grounding, even when there is so much of their father in him. The same eyes and determination to be better and to burn whatever is in his way to the ground. The only part that might shatter that illusion was the hair that never stayed away very long regardless of how often Touya tried to dye it, though the fact that it had gone white

some time ago was a blessing in and of itself in that it let his brother distance himself just a touch more.

"Second thoughts on what? This is what we've been waiting for," The teen twirls the knife absentmindedly in between his fingers and doesn't look at Touya. Green eyes never leaving the dual chromatic boy still pretending to be passed out in front of them. Izuku wants to remove the cuffs around his wrist and show him to a room, wants to open his arms and tell him that he understands. That he's sorry. That Shouto never has to be alone or fight for anyone other than himself ever again. But if this is going to go anything like Touya's first meeting it's safer this way. Especially given that the majority of the league had to be down the hall monitoring their other hostage of the night.

"Yeah, and I've been waiting my whole life to punch Endeavor in his face but I'm probably still gonna get burned when I do it." That gets a small twitch in the teen's shoulders and Izuku shifts in his seat. He was hoping the simple hoodie and jeans would help him seem less threatening to offset Dabi's, well, everything.

There's a beat of silence before Izuku sighs and looks pointedly at Dabi and then back at Shouto. The taller boy straightens his back, and moves slowly, purposefully making his footsteps louder than they usually are, before gently kicking at Shouto's chair. "So how long are you going to pretend to be asleep? We don't have all night." The response is near immediate, the dual chromatic boy's eyes snapping open and quickly taking in his surroundings.

"If you're trying to get at my father you've picked a poor way to do it." Izuku can hear the slightest strain on the words, exhaustion and stress. His older brother moves to stand along the wall, nearly blending into the shadows as Izuku leans forward excitedly, putting on his best smile to lighten the mood.

"Don't worry, this isn't about Endeavor, at least not really. Do you want a drink? Compress's quirk is pretty handy but it always leaves me thirsty when I get back out of it." Shouto says nothing, wrists tugging gently against the quirk suppressive cuffs to no avail. With a shrug, the green haired boy pulls a file from the floor beside him and begins to flip through it.

"We have a lot to get through, do you want to start with the public records or the private ones? They're both pretty bad, his approval ratings have never been high but in recent years they've plummeted. His civilian casualties are up and the amount of settlements he's had to pay off would be enough to bankrupt any hero below the top twenty and put a dent in anyone who wasn't higher than six." Shouto still doesn't move, doesn't even look at Izuku, eyes still locked on the door in front of him so the teen keeps going. "He's had to deal with backlash for several comments caught during fights or public recognitions concerning quirk bias, which might explain the way he cuts himself out of his children's lives the second they stopped being perceived as useful—" The boy's head finally snaps up and it feels like a victory.

"You don't know anything about my family." The words are carefully cold and Izuku wonders how many times Shouto has said that exact line to people who were concerned about him.

"You'd be surprised," comes the light response, the young villain thumbing through the papers with the same amount of interest as one would a week old newspaper.

"What is that supposed to mean?" Dabi snorts from the wall, but says nothing. His eyes glued to Shouto the same way that Izuku's had been. Maybe later Izuku would tease him for it but not now, not when it could topple the careful script he's laid out for the evening.

"It means that Enji was never interested in love, he was interested in

breeding the perfect weapon. He almost got it the first time, a child with fire that burned so hot so fast it destroyed the wielder but when Touya-

"How do you know that name," Dabi shifts again and Izuku's eyes slide to his, sharing a look. It's hard to say whether the chill in the captive's voice is from disinterest or hitting a raw nerve. Izuku presses on regardless, as his older brother's gaze locks back onto the human chimera in front of them.

"When Touya began to show the downfalls of this quirk beyond just minor burns along his hands Enji began trying for one without quote unquote deficiencies." He can see the clench of his brother's fists in his jacket pockets and wants to take the words back out of the air. He wants to make Enji apologize, shove the folder down the man's throat until his tongue is lined with paper cuts and he can't breathe around all the reports he paid to go away. "Three children later, he finally succeeded with you, but things only got worse from there, didn't they?"

"Did you know that he didn't even look for Touya when he disappeared? There's not a single missing child's report, not one newspaper clipping or online posting. Not just under Touya's name but for anyone matching his description either. All those years and no one even knew what to look for."

"Well, he did change his hair." There's an almost inaudible intake of air from Shouto as he begins to put the pieces together.

"I didn't find you through your hair, I found you through your blood. The same way I found Enji and," Izuku switches his gaze from the paper to the still bound Shouto and he watches as the final bits of the puzzle fall into place in his head, eyes snapping between Izuku and Touya like he can't decide who's a bigger threat at the moment. And while he would argue that neither of them would ever hurt Shouto, he can already hear pieces of the first time he met the League in the back of his head, Dabi

warning them that Izuku was everything they thought the fire quirked man was and more.

"We're not related." It's meant to be a statement but Izuku can hear the waver in his voice, the underlying question of *are we*?

"Endeavor said the same thing, but somehow he still recognized the quirkless runt of an extra-marital affair eleven years later by hair and eyes alone." He bristles saying the words aloud, still hearing his father's voice echoing off alley walls as Shouto decides, at least for now, that he's a bigger problem.

"Did you know that Enji carries the Cis AB mutation in his blood? It's funny really considering that less than one tenth of a percentage of the population in Japan has that genetic makeup."

"I was never very good at biology." Shouto's eyes are locked on the door behind Izuku, watching his captor through his peripheral vision alone. The green haired boy understands though, when he first brought the evidence to Dabi, the man had looked at him like he was the sun, as if it hurt to maintain eye contact with him for too long.

"When I got old enough to understand that he wasn't coming back, I started looking for my dad. The only thing I knew about him was that he had a quirk that let him breathe fire. It took me a couple of years to save up enough money for a test to trace my bloodline and when they came back and told me that my father carried that same gene. From there it was just a matter of finding him on patrol." Honestly, Endeavor was easier to track than almost anyone else that Izuku had studied before or since joining the League. Even when there was a change in the man's patrol it was usually only for something like a festival or parade that would announce he was going.

"You don't look anything like me."

"I take after my mom." Izuku doesn't let the grin fade even at the ache in his chest when he remembers her. He has her picture in his bag, but he's long since stopped taking it out. It feels like she's looking into him through the photo when he does and he doesn't know what she sees anymore.

"You know what he's like. More than Touya, more than me, and certainly more than the public and after tonight he is going to be given the number one mantle despite the allegations and critics and backlash that it will cause. They are going to put a man who trained his children like soldiers and threw them away when he was done with them on a pedestal and call him a symbol of peace." Izuku doesn't mean to lean forward as he speaks, he isn't even aware of it until Shouto leans back in his chair ever so slightly and he realizes it's in an attempt to keep space between them.

"All Might would never let that happen."

"By the end of the night All Might is going to be a man who pushes himself too far and leaves the shattered remains of the world balanced on the back of a child abuser and a teenage boy." The venom that seeps out seems to shock the multicolored teen, his eyes widening ever so slightly before shrinking back down to a scowl. Izuku lets his head drop and hang for just a second to clear the memory of closets full of hero merchandise and a too hot presence saying he was foolish for daring to dream. When he raises his gaze again he doesn't force the smile to come back, letting just a bit of the mask fall free in an attempt for authenticity.

"We're not going to hurt you. Not now, not ever. The heroes are coming to rescue Bakugo and Ragdoll any minute now and if you decide to go with them we won't stop you. But you don't have to. I know that some of the people from the League are rough around the edges—"

"You almost killed my teacher and my classmates. The USJ attack left several of us in the hospital." The tone of the words is strange. Not quite concerned, but something more than neutral all the same. Annoyance perhaps? Frustration? Izuku had known that Shouto was struggling to make friends but surely the teen cared for them on some level, right?

"And it was a wake up call that brought stricter guidelines on field trips and more security for public events. You're kids, you shouldn't be training like soldiers and the quickest way to prove that was to show you put in danger now rather than wait for you to age out into the real world." The word soldier causes something to seize up behind the teen's eyes, a wall coming down in a way that Izuku remembers from his earliest meetings with Touya.

"Why should I believe you? Fire quirks aren't rare and for all I know everything in that folder is fake." Shouto's tone finally simmers with something more than mild interest and Izuku wonders who it is that the teen is mad at. Green eyes lock onto brown and blue, letting the other search him for something that he can use to prove his story one way or the other and in the silence Dabi speaks.

"The training room always smelled like bleach because they would clean it overnight so the stains didn't set. Enji never let his fire drop for a second when he walked around the house even though there was no one to impress or intimidate other than us. Fuyumi sings lullabies to herself as she cooks and studies, but pop tunes when she showers or is getting dressed, and if Dad is home it's nothing at all. Natsuo would never admit it but he hates soba and pretends not to because it was a dish Mom liked to make." Shouto is stiff as a board in the chair that he's sat on, hands freezing in their latest attempt to tug against the cuffs. His face is unreadable, and Izuku wonders if maybe they were wrong. If maybe Shouto would want a different type of revenge than they did. Dabi continues speaking anyways.

"Hero society is corrupt. The people that he works for knew what he was doing every step of the way and didn't care. The people don't like him but they still support him. Stain had the right idea-" Izuku is quick to cut his brother's oncoming rant off at the head. There is a time and a place for spreading Stain's ideals and considering the run in Shouto's classmate had earlier in the year, this was neither.

"Even if his methods were a little extreme. You could be a great, no, the best hero, but in this structure it wouldn't mean anything at all if you weren't willing to become corrupt and broken like them." Izuku pauses again as he hears the shouting down the hall come to a momentary silence and his hairs stand on end. "All we're doing is giving you the chance to be your own person instead of his clone."

—

By the next morning there are two news stories circulating. The fall of All Might and the reveal of his skeletal frame following the defeat of All for One. What his retirement meant for Japan and the world. Whether or not his actions were reckless or selfish. Why he would spend his last days as the Symbol of Peace becoming a teacher.

But equally as popular are the articles that circle that remind everyone the raid failed. That there were three hostages and only one was recovered in the same condition that they were taken in. Bakugo Katsuki is vicious in any attempt to interview him, his quirk popping along his palms as his friends drag him away from the reporters. Everyone wants to know if he saw Ragdoll lose her quirk and what the villains had to say to him. If they told him what they planned to do.

But even more want to know what happened to Todoroki Shouto. As if the answer isn't clear in the empty quirk suppressive cuffs they found on the floor of the bar and the spears of ice that kept the building's infrastructure from collapsing in on one of the rooms in particular.

it takes five words.



there are times in
a person's life
when they know
they stand at a crossroads.





IZUKU
RISES

*lightning and centuries'
power enters his veins*

IZUKU
ROTS

*lets the words feed the
sweet decay inside*

IZUKU
VOWS

"watch me."

Mr. Robot's Janky Cousin

— Peter Henry

"Alright, cool. Meet me at the diner in a few."

Izuku hung up his phone. He took a moment to stare at the rain coming down in watery globs just a few inches away from his nose. His shoes were pretty worn and weren't thick enough to block any liquids from seeping into his socks. His toes felt cold; to try to warm them, he wiggled them a bit. The only result he got is the gross feeling of rubbing wet toes together. He needed new shoes.

He headed into the diner, the little bell ringed familiarly above his head.

The teenager working the graveyard shift glares at Izuku. She must be new. He sits down at his usual booth and pulls out his laptop. Not only was it the shiniest and the best-maintained thing he owned, but it was worth an arm and a leg. The fact that these things were getting more expensive for a fancier layout was laughable.

He patted his hands around his pockets to see if he forgot his wallet. He felt the outline of it and pulled it out eagerly. He had just gotten paid, so he was going to treat himself to a nice meal. His colleague didn't particularly enjoy it when he was eating during their interactions, but he was hungry. He rifled through the money quietly as the rain poured outside.

As he was combing through the cash, his mind failed to remind him of the bell that just rang to the left of him.

—

"Alright, cool, meet me at the diner in a few."

Deku hung up.

Katsuki pocketed his phone and continued walking toward the diner. He wasn't very far away anyway when Deku had called and informed him of a new "menu item." Katsuki had been hesitant to ask which item.

"Um. It might be hot wings, but it could just be a false alarm, you know?"

"Shit, okay, how much time do we – uh, have until the item is gone?"

"The deal is going on for about three days, so we have a limited amount of time."

"What are the consequences if we don't get the supposed hot wings?"

"Oh. Uh. I'd be very sad and so would uh, some kids. I promised some kids—a lot! A lot of kids, actually, you know, with my job and all, as a teacher. They all didn't flunk their math quiz... so... Hot wings! Oh, hold on. Yeah, I'd like no tomatoes and extra pickles, please."

Katsuki felt both equally disgusted by the supposedly "smooth" vigilante's inability to lie correctly, and the high stakes that he barely managed to stutter out.

"Where are you?"

He rounded the corner and clutched his bag closer to his hip. It was a code "hot wings," which means the situation they were dealing with was extremely sensitive. Huge billboard signs with dancing animations were announcing that the Hero Ball was almost here. The female voice announced that All Might and Endeavor would be there for the first time after their recovery from a taxing villain attack.

There were a lot of controversies surrounding that attack that stirred tension between heroes and the cities they were meant to protect. Katsuki wondered if that was what was on the line. More tension.

The diner came into sight and he caught the eye of Deku counting his cash. He was probably going to buy dinner. He hated it when he ate while they were at work. He had known him since they were still shitting in diapers and not once has he failed to chew with his mouth open. It was disgusting. He was disgusting, but at least he had the decency to buy him milkshakes in compensation for the behavior.

Katsuki snapped out of his thoughts when he heard something behind him. Rather than confronting it, he tried to be subtle. He stopped abruptly and animatedly pretended to forget something. He turned on his heel mumbling about forgetting a very important thing. He caught a glimpse of a silhouette of what appears to be a spy who is bad at what they do. He pulls out his phone and pulls up a prerecorded message that Deku made for this exact situation because of his weird habit of blanking when he plays the "I'm sorry I'm late for our anniversary" card.

"Hey, honey! I'm so sorry I'm late, I'll be there in a jiffy!"

"That's okay. Be here soon."

He paused the recording after it had played back a hang-up tone. The silhouette has the audacity, Katsuki will give them that. They had come closer, trying to listen to the conversation.

"Husbands, am I right? Always on your ass about *something*."

She sputtered.

"Yeah... haha."

"Well, I gotta go."

"Good luck with your husband, sir."

Katsuki saluted and sped-walked to the diner. He pondered some theories of what a clearly incompetent spy was doing in his presence. One, they could be some do-gooder sidekick of a hero that heard about them and thought that they could take them down with their mediocrity. Two, they could be someone trying to team up but is also incompetent. There's always the benefit of the doubt that would be better, for Katsuki had much smaller fish to fry.

He pushed open the door and a familiar bell rang above his head.

—

His colleague slammed into the seat across from him.

"You're late, Kacchan," he grumbled with a hamburger in his mouth.

"My apologies—" Typically, he'd end that sentence with something condescending, but the bell rang behind Kacchan. His colleague tensed and quickly corrected himself. "Honey, but work kept me behind."

Izuku closed his laptop and stuffed it back into its bag as his face burned at the pet name. He glanced at the new patron and laughed a little.

"How could you? Leaving your husband to eat alone and on our *anniversary*? Despicable." Izuku gestured to the half-eaten hamburger and the fries sticking out of said hamburger.

"Well, I did have an old friend of mine bump into me on the way here..."

"Don't worry about that."

Before he could say anything, the new waitress interrupted.

"A vanilla milkshake, for you sir."

She slid it in Kacchan's direction. He accepted it, still staring at Izuku. Kacchan mumbled a "thank you" and he took a slow sip out of the milkshake.

"So, what are we doing for our anniversary, honey?" Kacchan looked tired. Izuku wondered sometimes if he wanted to drop out of this whole "saving people" business. It was draining and risky. He didn't lose anything if he got caught, but Kacchan would lose a whole lot.

"Well, I told you about the new menu item, didn't I?"

"Well, was it a false alarm?"

"I doubt it."

Kacchan rubbed his forefinger and his thumb soothingly over the bridge of his nose. He noticed his knuckles were red.

"And why does it concern me?" He glanced over at the inconspicuous girl just a booth down from them. She was reading something on her phone.

"I know you don't like hot wings, but I told you, I promised some kids."

The waitress was wiping down the counters across the diner. Izuku wondered if she would be affected by what they might pull off together. He wondered if she knows anyone that will be affected by this stunt. She looked up and only saw a man and his husband instead of two

vigilantes that are slowly crossing the line of moral ambiguity.

"Alright, Izuku. I'll follow your lead on this one."

Izuku finished up his burger and Kacchan his milkshake, and they headed out to Kacchan's apartment.

Izuku sent a text to the girl and she nodded through the window as he left.

—

Katsuki opened the door a little aggressively. It was a weird door. It was heavy and the hinges weren't screwed on quite right, so it dragged on the floor. Small mistakes in the apartment building were all over the place. The guy next door was a former pro hero who always complained about how the water pressure in his kitchen sink was subpar during their weekly chess matches.

There was a family on floor five that had a kid with a flying quirk. The ceiling fan above the dining table was a bit loose and it wobbled when it spun. The kid flew into it and broke it, and now they have dinner with the light of the open kitchen next to the dining room. They haven't gotten it repaired since he moved in.

The girl upstairs had windows that didn't open, and the guy below him had so many things wrong with his apartment that the last time he went there he was browsing for a new building. The landlord didn't repair any of it.

He shoved the door open.

Deku learned his lesson a long time ago that if he left his bag on the floor and not in the designated hooks meant for them he would lose his

apartment visiting privileges. He left the computer in the bag and hung it up. Deku marveled at how clean it was as usual and sang his praises for it. He blocked it out; he needed to focus.

"So! Let's get to business!"

"Okay, what's the job?"

"We've got a real doozy on our hands, that's for sure, Kacchan. We're dealing with some real bad things..." Deku flopped down onto his sofa with no regard for the collateral damage that his foot brought down to his coffee table.

Katsuki rolled his eyes. He shoved Deku's foot off his coffee table and sat down along with him.

"What kind of bad stuff, Deku? If you're not going to cut to it, then get out. I don't have time for this."

Izuku raised his hands dismissively and continued.

"As I said before, this is time-sensitive."

Katsuki nodded.

"And, as you know, the Hero Ball is being held about three to four days from now. We don't have a very wide window, but it's enough."

"Enough for what?"

"Most journalists are aware that heroes are kind of untouchable, but most, if not all, have some skeletons in their closet."

"What did you find?"

"A lot... of bad things."

"Then why do you need my help? You seem like you could pull this off yourself."

"Because I don't condone bullies, or abusers, Kacchan."

Katsuki cringed.

"As we know. Go on."

"I want them dead."

—

The look on Kacchan's face was almost enough to make him back out of this idea. But he didn't.

"Deku—that's... I didn't know that's what we did. We help people, not... kill them."

"Killing them would help a lot of people, don't you think?"

"We're fucking vigilantes, not villains. Why do you want me to be a part of this anyway? You know I wouldn't be for it."

"Because," Izuku didn't flinch. He never did. "I'm sure as hell not getting invited to the Hero Ball, right? But I'm sure the shining star of Japan's most respected political magazine would."

Kacchan put his hands in his head slowly. He groaned loudly and shook his head. He had doubts. Of course he did, he wanted to be a hero like everyone else. Everyone wants to help people, but Izuku doesn't think Kacchan had come to terms with the path that he chose to go down. He

still had those same morals that the TV would play them every Sunday.

"Who would be helped, Deku?"

"Don't ask stupid questions, Kacchan."

Kacchan sighed. The lady upstairs was slowly turning up her music as if some sort of boiling the frog technique was going to stop him from going upstairs and kicking her ass.

"Okay, how about we compromise, huh? I know you like those."

"Don't patronize me. What do you have in mind, Kacchan?" He picked at his fingernails, almost looking bored. "'Cause don't think for a second I can't do this without you."

"You can't."

Izuku perked up at that. He knew he was right, he just didn't think Kacchan would question his intelligence like that.

"'Cause if you didn't, you wouldn't have called me over. Would you? Second, I know for a fact that the commission is keeping an eye out for every hacktivist, vigilante, and villain. They'll do anything to protect their profit, Deku." He leaned in and, for a second, Izuku felt like a kid again. "So if you want my help, compromise."

—

The smell of tobacco and some other things that were probably illegal floated to Katsuki's nose and surrounded his head in a thick fog. He was standing over Deku, who was sitting in a place called "The Arcade." It used to be an arcade, but now it was just an illegal tech cafe. The new owners kept the name because it was kind of fitting.

Deku was tapping away at his computer. Katsuki was kind of bored.

"So... what are you doing?"

"Hacker stuff," he replied.

"Specifically, Mr. Robot."

Deku's expression tightened and he typed a little harder.

"Oh, nothing much, just hacking into the mainframe, changing the U.S. president's pronouns on his Grindr account, and crashing Club Penguin, thank you for asking. I love talking about my job."

"Fuck you, too."

"Maybe don't ask me about my work while we're in a public space, alright?" Deku grunted.

Katsuki snorted.

"Okay, asswipe."

"Keep talking and I'll leak the All Might fanfiction you wrote in middle school."

Katsuki sucked in air through his teeth.

"Dude, chill, there are like, three scrawny dudes looking at us and I think they're going to spit dragon lore at us or some shit."

Deku snickered at that.

One of the scrawny dudes scowled at that comment and goes back to

his pirated Eragon book or whatever nerd literature he was reading.

"Shut up. I'm still mad at you."

"Why? Because I didn't put enough garlic in your spaghetti last night, honey?" He said dryly. He's eyed the vending machine. The Arcade always stocked up on the best snacks, and he was craving those cookies that are soft and kind of make his teeth ache afterward. Deku likes to say those cookies are just baiting you into buying milk. Katsuki always shushed him with a cookie.

Deku rolled his eyes a little at that but smiled anyway. It seemed a little genuine.

"No, because of you... ugh, I'm so mad I can't think of a good comeback."

"How about 'Hey loser, go back to Losertown because you're a loser.' That seems up your alley."

Deku gave a punch to Katsuki's gut.

"Oooh, I got you riled up, didn't I?" He said, recovering from the blow that thankfully didn't hit any vital organs.

Deku didn't say anything and went back to typing.

—

Izuku had wrapped up anything he needed to get done at the cafe. He was a little surprised at the lack of cybersecurity they had, considering they were looking out for villain attacks. He was able to make it seem as if Katsuki was a more important figure than he was, so that his significance made up for his asshole personality. Most heroes were

there prepping for the Ball, old and new, so Kacchan's job was to locate where they are and where they will be. Izuku's job was to wait until he had locations and names before he called in some favors.

Izuku hoped this went off without a hitch.

If it didn't...

"Hey," Kacchan snapped his fingers inches from Izuku's nose. "I can hear the gears in your head turning. We're going to be fine. You went over the plan in front of the mirror last night, I know you did." Kacchan looked handsome. His usual scowl was present, but now he was in a tuxedo. Izuku almost felt underdressed for an event he wasn't going to attend. Izuku swatted his hand away.

"I know we'll be fine, but..."

"But?"

"What if it doesn't?"

Kacchan stuffed his hands into his back pockets and whistled as his head tilted back in a way that Izuku hated. "Well then I guess fuck Murphy, right? I know what to do, and I won't fuck it up, so it lies on you, Deku."

Izuku scoffed. "That doesn't help me."

Kacchan's scowl softened for a second. "I know you won't fuck it up."

—

"This is Professor BDE, do you copy Student SDE?"

"You don't have a dick, dickweed," Katsuki muttered into a champagne glass. He glanced around himself casually. All the heroes were out of their hero suits and dressed head to toe in sponsorships and monuments to their money. All Might and Endeavor weren't out on the ballroom floor yet. He could tell because there weren't groups of people fighting to see them like a bunch of wolves scurrying to feast on their prey.

"It's about the energy, Kacchan. But never mind that, who do you see?"

A dude with red hair in a man bun.

"Red Riot."

A woman with braids woven into a complicated bun and a flashy outfit.

"Alien Queen."

A man with bark for skin and a woman with horns that said "Coca Cola" on them attached to his arm.

"Mount Lady and Kami Woods."

"Okay, so I'm assuming everyone that we need to be there is there. So I want you to look for a girl, she's going to be in a blue dress and you're going to ask her to dance."

Katsuki looked around. There were a lot of women in blue dresses.

"Which one?"

"Right, sorry. She's an old friend of mine. She's probably near the alcohol, she's pretty tall, curly brown hair, brown eyes, you get the gist."

"Mhm. Got it."

"After you ask her to dance, ask her if she knows who Mr. Robot is."

"You've taken a liking to the name, huh, pipsqueak?"

"Shut up, and go do what you need to do."

Katsuki set down his now empty champagne glass and glanced around until he saw where the bar was. Sure enough, a woman in a blue dress was sipping whiskey. He began to walk over to the bar. As he was shuffling and squeezing between dancers, he bumped into a kid. The kid was seemingly unfazed by the intrusion on his journey to the snack table and looked up at Katsuki with dead fish eyes.

"Hello." He was dressed in a small tuxedo and had a clip-on bowtie secured on his dress shirt.

Katsuki cringed. He hated kids.

"Hey kid, could you move?"

"I'm Shouto."

"Yeah? You look like you're in my way, so beat it."

The kid didn't move. "What's your name?"

Katsuki sighed heavily before he relented. "Katsuki, now move it, I need a drink."

"My dad drinks a lot."

Katsuki sucked in the air through his teeth. "Okay! That's enough." He

grabbed Shouto by the shoulders and moved him manually since the kid wasn't going to move on his own.

"Beat it, go get some chicken nuggets or something."

"Can I stay with you? My dad is mean, and he's yelling at the costume lady."

Katsuki paused. "Who... who'd you say your dad was?"

Shouto didn't blink. He was like a doll in a horror movie that was planning to spend all your savings then kill you. "Endeavour."

The woman at the bar looked over at them, as if he was already supposed to be there and now they're behind schedule.

"You know what, kid? You can hang out with me and my friend over there."

—

Izuku expected to see a lot of things tonight, but one thing he didn't expect to see was Kacchan hauling ass with a seven year old in his arms with most of the attendees running out of the building. He shot up in his seat and unlocked the doors.

Kacchan ripped open the doors and shoved the seven year old inside.

"You kidnapped a child?! What the hell happened in there?! Why did you turn off your mic?!"

"Okay, so this is Shouto, Shouto this is Deku, you're going to be staying with us for a while, okay?"

Shouto nodded and gestured to his seatbelt. While Kacchan buckled him in, Izuku was in hysterics.

"Kacchan, so help me, if you diverged from the plan after all the 'compromise' bullshit—"

"The thing is, I didn't." He looked outside of the window, and Izuku's old friend came out with the things they needed. A hard drive, a bag of phones, and what he can only assume to be a to-go plate.

She ripped open the passenger seat door and threw everything in the back.

"Drive!"

—

Izuku parked haphazardly next to his apartment building and rested his head on the steering wheel.

He grit his teeth then spat out, "What. Happened. Think really carefully how you answer that question."

"Izuku," the woman spoke, "Everything went to garbage when Endeavor came out of the dressing rooms, because Katsuki had heard about what Shouto here had told him about him, and..."

"And?" Izuku sighed.

"And... He kind of outed Endeavor as what he was. Then Endeavor had a live breakdown and kept repeating 'my career is over!' and then All Might came out then tried to stop all of it, and then Katsuki kind of outed him as a quirkphobe. A raging one."

Izuku groaned loudly and looked over at the kid in the backseat.

"Hey, Shouto, was it? Do you have anyone you can stay with? Other than your dad?"

Shouto thought carefully.

"I want to stay with Katsuki."





LOST
DOG

Hiring!

WANTED

Campos
Notes
像の七白
#13

Descent into Madness

– Feykir

A foot tapped against the concrete at a quick rhythm, the leg connected bouncing erratically. Izuku Midoriya fidgeted with a small box of cheap cigarettes, managing to get one out without dropping the entire pack on the ground. It was shoved between bitten lips, the box crammed back into his pocket before shaking fingers came up and attempted to light it with one of his quirks. Dark pink electricity sparked at his finger tip once, twice, three times before the cigarette actually began to smoke. Izuku gratefully pulled in a breath of chemicals, held it, then gradually let it seep out from between his lips with a sigh. His leg slowed down within the next few minutes until he was finally still. Calm. Quiet. He had always been a bit of a fidgeter, mind always running a mile a minute and hard to quiet. The nicotine helped though, eased his mind and allowed him to enter a still oasis. It also helped to get his bearings whenever he saw *him*.

Life seemed to have a bone to pick with Izuku Midoriya. Shortly after he was born, his father left, forcing his mother to quickly find a job in hopes that she could keep herself and her son off the streets. They didn't have much, but it was more than enough in their minds. Then again when he was four, life threw another punch. Izuku was pronounced quirkless, confirmed even by the doctor. In a society that determined a person's self-worth by their abilities, the lack of a quirk was even worse than a virtually useless one. His dreams were shattered, friends turned against him, and once more, it was Izuku against the world. Even so, he persisted. At age fourteen, he met his hero, the inspiration for his dreams. The Symbol of Peace himself, the epitome of hope, told him he had none. No one without a quirk could be a hero. And then like the world had tilted on him, everything quickly went to shambles, Izuku

helpless against the lot life had pitted against him. The very villain that had almost killed him went for his best friend, and Izuku could do nothing. There was so much smoke, explosions detonating left and right, fear in the eyes of someone he once thought fearless, invincible. And he was there, All Might, and he did nothing. Izuku saw him out of the corner of his eye as he screamed and pleaded for someone to help, saw that skeletal figure duck its head and slink away.

Kacchan died that day.

The heroes that were there were too worried about themselves to help, and those that were willing arrived too late. By the time the villain was defeated, Kacchan had died of asphyxiation. He was rushed to the hospital, had CPR done on him and was put on several machines in hopes that he could still be brought back, but it was too late. Too many heroes stood by and did nothing. *He* did nothing. And Izuku who was so desperate to rescue his friend was powerless to do so. His best friend was gone, his hero told him he was useless without a quirk, and Izuku Midoriya felt lost.

The time during the preparations for the funeral felt surreal. He felt as if he was constantly stuck in a thick fog that wouldn't allow him any sort of clarity. Watching the casket being lowered into the ground left the verdette in denial, and he refused to help bury it, just standing, staring as his best friend was put six feet under, never to see the day again. Izuku's grades plummeted. He was left alone by most, Kacchan's cronies nothing without their fierce leader. They scampered away from him with pity on their faces. At some point, Izuku just quit going to school altogether, heading out in the morning but never actually reaching his destination, wandering the streets and various alleyways. It was a couple months of this before he found an old door in one particularly dark pathway, and the stairs leading down to it were the beginning of his ascent to who, what, he was now.

The former Izuku would have never dreamed of camaraderie with villains. Granted, the present one didn't either, but in that moment in time, they were the only ones he seemed to have anything in common with. Rejected by society, failed by heroes. He didn't really agree with villainy itself, but they were just like him in a sense, and in time, the gang's leader, a crusty young adult by the name of Shigaraki, introduced him to a doctor and his experiments. They were monsters, there was no other word for them with their dead eyes and exposed craniums, but what they represented was what drew him in – the possibility that he could be given a quirk, that he would never be helpless and at the mercy of heroes ever again. Izuku had to wait, the doctor telling him that there was no way for the operation to be done on him without nomufication being the end result. It was maddening to be so close to the answer to his problems but unable to have it. So he waited and waited and waited some more. Izuku failed to return home, and after various calls to the school, the Bakugous, and Inko, was pronounced missing. He seldom left the hideout, but when he did, he tore down any posters he saw. There was no desire to return to that life of pity and helplessness. A life where he would be coddled and whispered about behind his back, insulted because of his misfortune. No, Izuku Midoriya would not be going back home, not now, not ever.

When the time finally came, he was nervous. It was understandable, seeing what had happened to those before him, but the Nomus had become more and more efficient, no longer completely mindless. Izuku wouldn't be made to be a mindless soldier anyways. He was here for a quirk, and then he would use it to bring down hero society. It failed him, it failed Kacchan. Those heroes stood by and did *nothing*. It was those thoughts that pushed him to go through with the procedure and helped him through the pain of a new quirk setting into his body. His teeth dug into a leather belt, and his body sweated. At some point, Izuku passed out only to wake sore and groggy but feeling energized at the same time. The doctor told him he would have to take it easy for a bit and rest. If he didn't, permanent damage to his body could be done. The quirk

would need time to settle fully into his body and become his.

Izuku was eager though, trained his quirk relentlessly even before it was deemed safe to wield it in his desire to never be helpless again. There were definitely repercussions. His body wasn't yet suited to effectively handle the electricity surging through him, and the result of too much too soon were permanent Lichtenberg scars covering his right arm and going up his neck to his cheek. They had also spread around that same shoulder and a few ribs below it. There were other physical side effects as well, a perpetual weakness in that right arm along with tremors. That wouldn't do, so he went back to the doctor.

His second quirk was not what he had first intended to receive. In reality, Izuku had hoped for a strengthening quirk, but it was decided that it might not work as intended and could perhaps damage his faulty arm further. So the quirk would have to be one that allowed him to work around his weakness. Overall, that meant avoiding direct combat and overexertion. Many hours later, the verdette had a surveillance type quirk, one that allowed him to sense vibrations and judge the positions of his adversaries along with the added perk of heightening his senses overall. Now he could keep his distance from his marks and those targeting him, knowing where they were before they ever noticed his presence. It was the upper hand he needed.

Dismantling hero society was not easy. Attempts at going after the hero commission failed every time; they were just too guarded. Instead, Izuku focused on picking off smaller heroes along with some hacking, leaving messages on screens in trains and elsewhere around the city, dissuading people from endorsing a society that treated people as pawns based on their quirks and encouraged what were essentially celebrities to hold the safety of the people in their hands. He put up horrifying statistics about many heroes' failures and dug up dirty pasts. Of course, this made him a target, and the League was only willing to protect him for so long. Izuku had never had any intention of staying

Their views just didn't quite add up, and he wasn't willing to take orders from anyone, not anymore. He wouldn't allow himself to be held back.

A run in with a particularly wily hero left Izuku with cracked ribs and the lesson that he couldn't just rely on his quirks to defend himself, at least not the two he had currently. When he wasn't busy tracking heroes down, hacking, and digging up dirty secrets, the verdette spent his time teaching himself a variety of martial arts using the library computers, bundled up in hoodies, caps, and scarfs in an attempt to disguise himself. He needed quicker reflexes and the knowledge to not only defend himself but take his opponent down. It was easy to learn everything, analysis had been a skill of his since he was very young as evidenced by the copious notebooks that had been filled to the brim with hero notes. However, it was impossible to actually put that knowledge into practice by himself. An opponent was needed. There were none though, Izuku was on his own after all, so his only option was to gain experience through encounters with heroes.

It didn't go well.

At first, everything was fine. He picked out inexperienced heroes to practice with, utilizing his electric quirk to incapacitate them if things go too out of hand and retreating if he sensed back up approaching. Then he would head back to his home, currently an abandoned hospital, and review the fight. Improvement was not optional; it was necessary. A particularly bad fight left him dragging himself back to the League in desperation though. It was going fine, just some low rank hero whose quirk was simple enough to work around. It was fine when they got panicked and unpredictable. It was no longer fine when back up came. Some sort of distress call had been sent out, and another hero showed up. He heard them coming, but the problem was that they were too fast. It was impossible to retreat in time with his combative abilities being strictly close range. The inability to distract or fight them off until they were too close resulting in him taking the full force of their high velocity

kick. It was impossible for him to combat a speed based quirk, especially with his head spinning from being slammed into a wall. There had to be fractured bones at the very least. Of course, resisting arrest didn't go well either. Izuku was lucky to get away from that encounter. By then his right leg was looking horribly mangled, large bruises were already forming, and his body in general hurt all over from the sheer amount of electricity he had put out in order to buy some time to escape. Turns out he wasn't quite as accustomed to the sheer power of his quirk as he thought he was, especially not in the presence of conductors like the metal making up some of the hero's outfit. It caused his quirk to not only attack them but him as well as he lost control of it.

When he finally arrived at the League's abode, Izuku spat out a bit of blood and glared at Kurogiri fiercely, gritting out, "I need another quirk. Now." A telekinesis quirk allowed him some long range attacks and was deemed to be a good fit given the nature of his mother's quirk. The doctor figured that it would settle into him easier that way. Dealing with both healing from injuries and assimilating a new quirk was too much for his body though. Izuku ended up crashing hard shortly after the procedure. Things weren't the same after that. He had extreme headaches that came out of nowhere, had difficulties telling dreams from reality, and saw ghosts.

And that led him to where he was now.

Izuku sighed, another cloud of smoke escaping upwards as he did so. His head throbbed horribly right now. No amount of over the counter pain meds did anything to dull it. No doctor would see him unless he visited some sketchy underground one with a revoked license, and even then the two that he had visited had no idea what was causing the pain. Both seemed to agree they were probably quirk related but weren't able to actually do anything about the headaches. They were just something he had to live with now, like his weakened arm and broken body and *him*. Tired green eyes moved to the right. A puff of blond hair

came into view, unmistakable. The male wore a black school outfit, the exact same one Izuku himself wore years ago. A familiar sneer twisted those lips, and carmine eyes blazed fiercely. Izuku often debated the pros and cons of just giving in. This life was so *lonely*. He needed a friend, someone to talk to. And so he did.

"Hello, Kacchan."

Is this really necessary
Mr. Midoriya?

Uhuh..

I won't pay the fine
until I've done the time...

I must repay my debt to society!

Sir, It's a parking fine...



springtime in winter

– Starry

There is something incredibly wrong with Midoriya Izuku.

Katsuki can't quite put a finger on it yet. There's a...confidence, he'd say, that's come over his former childhood friend. Especially after Katsuki got accepted into U.A. and Deku *didn't*, he's seen less and less of the green-haired boy. Katsuki only sees him when he comes home to his mother (which is rare enough as it is) and occasionally around the neighborhood, walking home from whichever high school he managed to get into.

Deku's smart. It's a known fact that Katsuki knows like the back of his hand, remembering the times that Deku would ramble off hero facts like they were a part of him and how he'd whisper the correct answer under his breath in class. Even then, Katsuki's expecting him to go *somewhere* smart, because that's where Deku excels the best. Not being a hero due to his reckless fucking nature is just a bonus at this point.

Even then, Katsuki's worldview has shifted a bit. After getting his ass handed to him by goddamn piece of shit Todoroki, he grudgingly agrees that maybe he's not top shit, and instead focuses on making himself and his Quirk better to set out and achieve his top dream ever since he was a kid; become the Number One Hero and overtake All Might in that department.

(It is weird, though, having the huge, lumbering man make his way through the halls, sometimes clutching part of his chest. Katsuki's so used to seeing the joyful energy from All Might that he sometimes forgets he's human too.

And of course, humans make mistakes.)

But Deku is different. And Katsuki knows he's fucked up before, in the way he'd let his Quirk singe and burn against freckled skin, and he will always remember the way he left Deku by himself after tossing his journal out the window and letting poison drip from his lips.

(For a few months he'd think back on that; why did he say that shit? Why the *fuck* would he ever tell someone that? How the fuck did anyone handle his middle school self, so vile and so full of hatred, and allow him to move on? He knows he has to do better, he has to *be* better, so he wants to make up for it.)

It starts, as it always does, with Deku.

Katsuki finally manages to catch him when he's walking home from U.A., spotting the green curls when the sun hits them just right. "Oi, Deku!" he shouts, cupping his hands around his mouth. "Get the fuck over here! Gotta talk to you about some shit!"

Deku turns around in shock and Katsuki recoils in surprise. There's a bandage over his nose, and a cotton gauze taped on his cheek. A bruise sits on his temple, almost obscured by the curly hair. "Kacchan?" He asks, hesitant but still somehow so joyful. "It's been a while! How's U.A. going? Are there a lot of hero hopefuls like you?"

"Tch. Of course there are, we're the best of the best!" Katsuki boasts, dutifully ignoring the way he watched Kaminari knock himself out with a lightning strike and *then* proceeded to knock out Sero when he ran over to help. "Haven't seen your dumbass around often, the fuck are you up to?"

Instead of telling him, something shifts in Deku. He takes a stance that Katsuki recognizes as "fight-ready" and nonchalantly replies, "Is this a

trick? Why do you wanna know, Kacchan? You've never cared enough to ask, y'know."

"What the *fuck*—"

"I'm just saying!" Deku protests, spreading his hands out. "You never really wanted to know before. But you caught me at a bad time, I gotta go work on something, okay? Maybe we can chat later!"

And before his very eyes, Deku spins on his heel and skips towards his house. Katsuki stares after him, dumbfounded, and comes to the realization that he's just having a bad day. Deku's anger was a petty thing when they were younger, but it might've manifested into something soft and terrifying like Auntie Inko's.

(Katsuki shudders at the thought.)

And yet, he wants to *follow* him for some weird reason. Katsuki has no fucking idea why, but it nags at him to follow-up. Maybe it's the future upcoming hero part of him, but his body moves to figure out what Deku is doing before his mind catches up. Sure enough, Deku *doesn't* enter his apartment, and instead heads around the back towards the city again.

Bakugou Katsuki is not a stealthy man. He's flashy and loud, but Deku melts into the surrounding shadows like an old friend. He does his best to remember the training from Aizawa so far and keeps catching glimpses of curly green hair, cursing when he keeps losing the goddamn bastard.

Following Deku into the city is fairly easy, which is never a good sign. Deku's unfortunately a paranoid kid; any noise or sound close by, he'd investigate or at least acknowledge. Katsuki *knows* he slipped a bit when avoiding a gross-looking puddle and trying to duck into the train

station, and Deku didn't turn around.

Something is *horribly* wrong.

It's worse when, after trying to follow Deku from Musutafu to Yokohama, he stops outside a dingy bar in Kamino Ward. Deku slips inside with no hesitation and the last thing Katsuki hears is, "Hey, Kurogiri!"

....Wait.

From the USJ?

FUCK. Katsuki's a reckless bastard, but not as bad as Deku is, and instead decides to take the roof route, ignoring the way he wants to break down the door with explosions in hand. Before he even makes it, a very familiar inky portal opens beneath his feet, and Katsuki lets out an unmanly yelp as he plummets straight through.

Sure enough, he comes face-to-face with the burning yellow eyes of Kurogiri when he drops in. The bartender looks moderately bored but wordlessly hands over a pair of cuffs to fucking Deku, who's waiting with a smile but frowns at the cuffs.

Katsuki would recognize those Quirk suppression cuffs anywhere, and his fingers twitch before he roars and fires an explosion off. "FUCK OFF!" He snarls, feeling the rage start to bubble in his throat. "YOU FUCKING PIECE OF SHIT, DEKU! YOU WANNA JOIN THESE GODDAMN SHITHEADS, HAH? COULDN'T MAKE IT INTO U.A. SO YOU TURN TO BECOMING A *VILLAIN*?"

"Hey, rude." Deku looks affronted before tossing the cuffs away. "I probably could've made it if it was written only, but they're really discriminatory against Quirkless people. I guess I should've been prepared for that, actually. Before you blow my face up, please take note

of your surroundings before you attack me. I thought Eraserhead would've taught you that already."

He *did* teach them that, actually. Katsuki makes sure there's no one behind him before taking a quick scan. Kurogiri stays behind the bar, Deku's in front of him, and...

Something glints in the corner of his vision. Toga's standing near the jukebox, knife twirling in her fingers, and Twice pokes his head out. Dabi looks bored as he plays with a tiny flame on the tip of his pointer. And sure enough, Shigaraki's sitting in a booth, watching with one raised eyebrow.

Ah. Alright. Fair enough. Katsuki tears his gaze away and bares his teeth at Deku. "So what, gonna fucking kill me? Use me as a symbol against U.A. and their shitty security?"

"What?" Deku blinks. "Why in the world would I do that? That would defeat the entire purpose of having you here, actually. No, I just knew you were following me so I figured I'd stop and say hello. You wanted to know how I was, right?"

"Doesn't explain how the fuck you ended up here," Katsuki snaps, and Deku kinda shrugs at that before gesturing to Shigaraki. "Can I take him outside? He's not part of the plan, so I'm pretty sure he'll be okay."

"He's gonna go fucking blabber to U.A., asshole, but sure." Shigaraki grumbles. He looks more annoyed than anything, but just flicks a hand (no pun intended) and allows it. Deku beams before grasping Katsuki by the arm, dragging him outside.

Katsuki's so fucking out of it that he barely protests or makes a remark about how rough and scarred Deku's hands have become. He hisses when Deku lets him go on the sidewalk, but pauses at the fierceness in

in Deku's brilliant green eyes.

"You didn't deserve that," Deku blurts out, fists clenched at his side. "At the Sports Festival, I mean. They chained you to the fucking podium like an animal, like someone who didn't deserve first place. I mean, it was so *obvious*! Todoroki didn't give his all, so why give you first place? It was given, not earned. I just don't understand! U.A.'s supposed to be better than that!"

"And what about you, asshole." Katsuki snarls. He knows when he's been beaten, so he holds his head high and makes sure Deku stays in his line of sight. "You're supposed to be better than this! You're just a fucking dorky analyst who could rattle off anyone's Quirk like no one's business —"

Katsuki pauses. It's only because he's just realized how horrifying it is that Midoriya Izuku has turned to villainy, and tries to not acknowledge the shudder that runs through him when thinking about Deku's library of notes that could break down someone's Quirk in under thirty minutes to find its weakness. "...You're working with the League of Villains."

Deku hesitates, and then bursts out, "Not really! Listen to me Kacchan, and you gotta listen closely, okay? I can't repeat this or I'll really be killed this time. Look, do you remember the Sludge attack?"

Of course Katsuki remembers it. He thinks he'll remember it for the rest of his life, the way that the disgusting liquid poured itself down his throat and how immobilized and *stuck* he was. His Quirk was useless, and no one came to help him.

Except for Deku. And then All Might, and then...

Well. There's a reason Katsuki can't stand being restrained, and he recognizes that Deku not wanting the cuffs was a way of not restraining

Katsuki. There was also a hint that Deku had watched the Sports Festival; had his former childhood friend protested and cried out at the injustice of the entire situation when the muzzle was fitted on Katsuki?

"Fuck off, asshole." Katsuki snaps. Deku gives him an unimpressed stare and barrels on. "I know it looks like I'm working with them, but I'm *not*. I'm not directly associated with them! They're a bunch of assholes and since I know what that feels like, I usually stay away. Stain really liked me so I'm thinking about taking up a path like he did? But I'm still not sure yet, it's all very complicated."

"What the fuck happened to you idolizing All Might?" Katsuki hisses, looking around to see if any of those assholes were listening to him. "He was your favorite! You always said you wanted to be like him!"

"Not anymore," Deku says sadly, shoving his hands into his pockets. "Say, Kacchan, if your best friend and childhood hero both told you that you were essentially worthless and wouldn't amount to anything, especially having no Quirk, what do you think would happen?"

Katsuki doesn't have to answer, because the proof is in front of him. The overall horror of the situation is starting to dawn on him, and he honestly doesn't know if Deku or the League of Villains is a much scarier comparison to what's going on.

Because Midoriya Izuku is a Quirkless kid, one that no one would ever consider looking twice at. He's plain enough and boring that ordinary people would pass over him in a second. Hell, even the fucking heroes passed over him when Katsuki was saved from the Sludge attack; they commended Katsuki when he hadn't fucking done anything, and Deku had gotten scolded for his actions, despite the fact that his intervention had saved Katsuki's life and Deku had slipped through the cracks once again.

"Shut up," Katsuki instead replies. "Answer me this, though; what the hell do you mean *killed this time*? Are you implying you were killed before? Did the League put their fucking hands on you?!"

Deku gives him a weird look, eyes flickering to the bar where the League was waiting for him. "Kacchan, I know you're not dumb. How do you think I met All Might? The Sludge villain caught me before he got you, and I don't have a Quirk. It went about as well as you think it did. When All Might told me I couldn't be a hero, the League was there to pick up the broken pieces. Does that make sense?"

"I don't want it to," he says honestly, because with the constant barrage of insults and hatred that spewed from Katsuki's mouth, and society's promise that Quirkless people would never amount to anything, it made sense that Deku would have to create his own path to make a difference in the world.

Not for the first time, Katsuki quietly wishes that Deku didn't have the stupid fucking heart of a hero. It made him unbearable and insufferable, but putting his analytic skills and cleverness to something other than heroics was quite jarring.

Deku shrugs. "That's the way of the world, Kacchan. I'm really sorry it had to come to this, but that's what I learned while doing all of this; not all men are created equal. I'm proud of you, though. You seem to be getting better with both your Quirk and with making all your friends at U.A. It's what you deserve; to be a hero and to get friends that can finally stand on your level."

"So what now?" Katsuki asks, ignoring the twinge of *something* in his chest at the idea that this is where they part ways. They've known each other all their lives; what now, now that they're on two ends on the spectrum? The *one* person that stuck by Katsuki all his life, and now he was the reason he was a fucking villain.

Deku seems to notice the conflict in his eyes. "Hey, this wasn't actually your fault, y'know. I needed a reality check that I couldn't become a hero and All Might was the one that pushed me over the edge. It's just been a really, really long life, and I was tired of hitting dead ends. At least this time I can actually do something with my life."

"You fucking moron," Katsuki chokes out. "You could spill the fucking information you have on the League, dipshit. You could go to the heroes and fucking tell them what's going on! You could do *something* for once, you dumbass Deku!"

"I *am* doing something," Deku says slowly. "I'm going to take the stupid Hero Commission and rip them off their high horse. Kacchan, don't you know that they cover up misdeeds of heroes and toss away others who try to defy them? I'm not with the League, I swear, but I refuse to stand for heroism if this is what it gets me. Plus, if I tell them, then you'll never see me again. They use heroes for their own use! Just look at Hawks! He's tied around their finger! Poor guy wants to get away, but his *entire* life he's been used by them! He's so tired and wants to rest for once."

"The fuck you talking to goddamn Hawks for," Katsuki snarks, ignoring the trembling in his hands. "We're here to save people and become heroes, Deku, and if you're not on our side then I'll have to take you in."

Deku quietly resolves to not tell Katsuki about the late dinner plans he has with Keigo; they bond over wanting to take down the Commission, and catching Keigo up on simple mundane things he missed out on while training his ass off as a child. "You should hate them too," he mumbles, and squeaks when Katsuki fixes a ruby-red glare at him. "For a few reasons! I swear I have a point!"

"Get on with it," Katsuki growls, trying to figure out if he should radio for backup. He's still a student with a provisional license; he technically has legal authority to be here, but...would the actual Pros believe his word

since he was still a child?

Deku takes a quick, shuddering breath, interlocking his fingers together. Katsuki notes with shock that they're scarred and crooked, and wonders what the *fuck* Deku was up to in their months apart. "First off, the Commission doesn't care about their heroes." He blurts out. "They *chained you up* at the Sports Festival, Kacchan! They didn't respect that you didn't want to be crowned champion, and forced you to take it as a sign of power to everyone else. They only care about wealth and fame! Why is there a Hero Ranking anyways! Real heroes are supposed to care about helping others and saving the people, not wondering if they'll rise in the ranks just to earn some more cash.

"Secondly, they're all incredibly snobby people who want to stay in power." Deku snarls. Something in him seems to change and shift into someone older and wiser as he stands his ground. Katsuki balks in surprise and digs his nails into his arm at the mention of the festival that's haunted his thoughts for quite a long time. "They want to use heroes as pawns! They want to breed soldiers for a new world, Kacchan. Just ask Hawks! He's the current one and he's so, so tired. The only reason he's managed to break out of the mindset is because he's been trying to branch out and become as normal as he can be. Do you know how sad it is that he's never experienced a normal childhood? Mine might be filled with explosions and insults, but he's grown up with white walls and constant training. I had the love of my mom and a few heroes to look up to."

"Deku," Katsuki tries to intervene, but the vigilante isn't having it.

"And *finally*," Deku spits out, shaking with watery eyes. "There are some heroes who don't deserve to be one. They cover up misdeeds, corruptions, and scandals that should be brought into the public's eye, and they're just *buried and discarded*! Allegations of child abuse, Kacchan! Especially when they're TRUE! If fucking Endeavor can get

away with it, then so can everyone else. The rules should apply to everyone."

Silence falls across their sidewalk. Deku has a few tears falling down his cheeks before he furiously wipes them away, jaw clenching angrily. "So. There's a few reasons I want to bring down the Hero Commission, and I'm sorry that there's not a lot I can do to help. But even if I can't be a hero, this is the best I can do for now."

Katsuki has a few options. He can drag Deku away, Quirkless and screaming, to the police and hand him over. He could possibly ignore seeing Deku, especially since Midoriya Izuku was a kid that society didn't care about anymore once he was branded without a simple power.

Or...

Katsuki takes a deep breath, and judges the situation. *Stay level-headed*, Aizawa had said, golden eyes boring into their class. *Assess what you can, and make a judgement call. Sometimes the scenario is not what it seems.*

If there were any faults of Midoriya Izuku, it was that he was too fucking reckless for his own good and had a heart of gold, regardless of any situation they ended up in. He's also one of the best analysts that Katsuki knows, and he could definitely use his skills in areas that Katsuki's lacking in.

"Deku," Katsuki says, and then frowns. He chews on the word in his mouth and tries again. "Izuku. I'm only going to say this once, so listen the fuck up."

Deku watches with his eyes wide. It's been a while since anyone addressed him as his given name, and the way it cuts from Katsuki's

tongue makes his eyes water. "I'm a fucking hero, Izuku." Katsuki continues. "Being a hero means to win no matter the circumstances, and bring justice to motherfuckers who deserve it. I'm gonna fucking help you because you're a bastard who needs someone to be your brawn."

"You're also smart, Kacchan," Deku says, almost warmly. "But... thank you. I'd really, really appreciate it."

They both reach forward to shake each other's hands; an uneasy partnership for now, but they have one goal in common since they're both heroes in their own right. It'll take some time and dedication, but now that Deku and Kacchan are Izuku and Katsuki again, they can take the first steps to rebuilding a broken society.

(And maybe become friends again in the process.)

東良店



万ズテ



大正

reaching our destiny with hands stretched, fingers touching

– Ace

Izuku remembers the day his dreams were crushed.

It wasn't on the fated rooftop, but after: with the sun setting behind All Might's skinny form, arm stretched out with a huge smile on his face as he offered Izuku his *quirk*.

The scene was vivid, and bright despite the words exchanged. If it were in a different universe, Izuku would've accepted it would open arms and tears streaming down his face. However, this was not the universe. In this one, Izuku still cried, sure, but not of happiness.

He never regrets rejecting the quirk. As much as he wanted to become a hero, he wanted to become one on his own terms. Not because of a flashy quirk, or anything of the sort. Yet, he understands that he won't become like All Might, or Endeavor (thank goodness for that).

He will, however, become something else entirely; his own type of hero...

"Midoriya-san." A voice interrupts Izuku from going further into his thoughts.

Izuku's head springs up at the call of his name and meets unimpressed bleak eyes.

Scrunching his shoulders up to his ears, Izuku squeaks out an apology. Quite frankly, he hates this part of himself; the quiet and easily frightened part of him.

Ectoplasm let out a sigh, his face was blank and monotone as always, but Izuku could feel disappointment radiating off of the hero in radioactive waves. Izuku can feel the burning gaze against his head as digs his fingernails against his thighs, the slight pain stutters a breath out of him.

"This isn't like you Midoriya," the hero states, firm and disappointed. He walks away from Izuku's desk, gliding away like a ghost. "Does anyone else know the answer to my question?"

From the front, a girl with straight, blonde hair raises her hand.

"X equals 24!" She exclaims, shooting a smirk at Izuku.

Izuku groans, setting his face against his desk.

—

"Hey, what happened during class?" Shinsou asks, between bites. He stares at Izuku, unreadable even to Izuku, with a raised eyebrow.

Izuku doesn't respond. Letting out a sigh, he traced a circle in the soba with his chopsticks and watched the little ripples in the broth.

"Midoriya," Shinsou says again, kicking his leg. It was a soft kick that made Izuku raise his head from the steam filtering out of the soup.

Contrary to how Shinsou is perceived by others, this rough and dangerous guy, the boy was quite soft in his own way, with a harsh and rather sassy personality.

"How do you even know?" Izuku asks, tired eyes blink at his equally tired friend, "we aren't even in the same class?"

"Hatsume," Shinsou says without much of a thought, taking a bite out of his hamburger.

Izuku groans, dropping his face against the table.

"Hatsume said you did that a lot too," Shinsou says, chin set on his palm.

Izuku flicks a pea and it hits Shinsou on his forehead.

"Ow."

—

"Hey, hey, did you see what Dekiru did a couple of days ago?" a group whispered behind Izuku.

Midnight drones on and on about who knows what. Izuku stopped listening a bit ago; he just can't seem to focus at all.

"Yes!" one of the girls exclaims, giggling sheepishly when the other two shushed her. "He was so cool! Especially, when he just zipped away before the cops showed up!"

"Honestly! Bless that Herotube account!" a guy says.

Izuku feels heat flush against his cheeks, spreading to the tip of his ears and the back of his neck.

"Are you serious?" someone whispers, full of snobbishness.

Izuku glances over, just as the other students did.

"This Dekiru dude is basically a villain and is pretty pathetic!" he says, waving his hand. "He doesn't even use his quirk, or maybe doesn't even

have one!"

Izuku's hands gripped his thighs. Thankfully, before he could hear anymore, a voice calls out to him.

"Midoriya."

His head snaps forward. Sweat courses down his cheek.

"Yes?" he squeaks out, looking up at Midnight who raises an amused eyebrow. Behind him, he hears laughter. It rang in his ears and he couldn't help but think of middle school for a second.

"Take these to All Might," she exclaims with a wink, handing him a packet of papers. Izuku shivers, and grabs the packet with a slight nod, "he's in Ground Beta. You know where that is right?"

"Yes, Ma'am...", Izuku squeaks out.

"Ah, no need for Ma'am, Midoriya-kun!" she says, arms crossed. Snapping her fingers at a couple of students who were looking over at them. They look away. "Just Miss Midnight is fine!"

Izuku nods and stands from his table, chair sliding against the ground. He leaves the room without much of a comment; the stares at the make of his head made him even more anxious.

—

Izuku felt his heart threatening to pound out of his chest; the papers in his grip felt heavy. He's not sure why he was chosen to do this.

Before he would jump at the chance to meet All Might, to hand All Might *papers*, but now he just feels dread bubbling in his stomach like a

volcano ready to erupt his insides.

He stops in front of Ground Beta. The doors were open a sliver, just enough for Izuku to see through it without being noticed. A loud crash resonates from inside as excited shouts and cheers were heard. Clenching the papers closer to his chest, Izuku approaches the tiny opening and looks through it.

A group of students with Yuuei's P.E uniform were standing around a fighting mat. In the middle, Kacchan attacks a guy with spiky red hair with explosions popping from his fingertips.

Izuku's body tense, and he stops breathing altogether. Memories flash within his mind, each one sets the dull aches and bruises to set flame.

Even so, with his heart threatening to beat out of his chest and the apprehension radiating out of him in waves, he can't seem to look away. Because the boy—Izuku has seen him around, very friendly, despite him hanging around Kacchan and his sharp teeth—is holding his own against the blonde boy's explosive strikes; whenever Kacchan attacked him, the boy's skin would turn jagged, and rock-like. It was amazing.

Izuku's fingers twitch, itching to grab a pen and scribble about the fight in his journal. He wants to ask him about his quirk—can he harden his skin into a smooth surface, or does it have to be spiky? What about morphing those spikes into something else entire...

A cold sensation against the top of his head interrupts his thought process. He lets out a squeal—oh, that's embarrassing; he can already hear Kacchan laughing at him—and turns around. Green eyes meet a distinct pair of eyes...

Oh.

Throughout his childhood, Izuku recorded info on any Pro-Hero on the scene and those who retired, no matter his feelings towards them, in his many notebooks—it was a habit that slowly turned into his one and only saving grace as the years went on.

Endeavour hasn't been a hero he liked very much. His son, however, is a different story; Izuku would rather die than admit it to someone.

"Are you some sort of stalker?" Todoroki says, face free of emotion save for a raised eyebrow as he lifts a straw to his lips.

Izuku meeps, shaking his head frantically. Fringes appear in front of his eyes, wild hairs spring out like weeds, and his grip on the packet of papers tighten against his chest.

"I'm here to give something to All Might!" He exclaims, red faced.

Todoroki tilts his head, an unreadable expression appears on his face.

"Uhhh," Izuku trails off, scratching the back of his neck.

Todoroki throws the carton in a nearby trash can, and opens the door. He glances at Izuku between his multi-colored bangs before going inside.

—

Sharp wind cuts Izuku's face as he jumps from building to building. There was always something about running around under the mask of Dekiru, with the moon shining down on his figure, that made him feel alive. A breeze strikes through his hair, curly and frizzy. He always felt this sense of freedom under his disguise, free to say and do whatever he pleases, free to be a better version of *himself*.

As a child, he never really liked his hair, always too big, always too curly that it would sometimes hurt to comb in the mornings...his mother seemed to like it though. So, he doesn't mind it that much anymore—he likes the feeling of the wind rushing past it anyways.

A sharp beep echoes within the quiet of the neighborhood, and a red light blinks from his screen. Izuku hops on a nearby roof, and checks his watch: a robbery at a nearby convenience store.

With a sigh, Izuku jumps from the house, landing on the ground and starts running towards its coordinates.

God, how he loves this watch. It's a nifty little gadget he came up with Hatsume. He had never told her about his illegal...habit and either she was too caught up with his ideas he wanted help on, or she knows and could care less.

He has a feeling it's the latter; after that day, Hatsume never fails to bombard him with invention ideas each week—all crazier, but no less amazing, then the next. How the girl has the ability to create many things in a short amount of time is a mystery to him and everyone who knows her.

Izuku lands in an alleyway just at the nick of time. A crash is heard and two people are running out of the store, backpacks on both of their backs, and no hero in sight.

It didn't surprise him—or, more like trying to keep himself from being disappointed. He learned a while ago that heroes never help around here: a poor area with an outburst of villain activity.

Without a hint of hesitation, Izuku rushes towards the duo, without a sound in his step, and strikes a smoke bomb at their feet. Within minutes their vision is blinded by a thick sheet of smoke appearing, and Izuku

slips on his goggles—another product created by Hatsume, with Izuku's designs.

"What the fuck—?" one of the robbers exclaims. Izuku kicks the back of their legs before they could finish the statement, and they land on the floor with a resounding *thump*.

Izuku grins, and rushes towards the groaning duo.

Just as the smoke began to settle, the robbers were all tied up with the strongest knots that Izuku could tie. They groan as Izuku drags them away from the streets and to the police station.

(In the morning, Naomasa finds two tied up robbers in front of the police station, and graffiti on the wall in from stating:

Found these guys robbing a store :D Don't worry, they're okay, just a little beat up around the edges!

- Dekiru

Naomasa sighs, rubbing the bridge of his nose. He can already feel a headache forming.)

—

Izuku enters through the window and slips off his costume. It lands on the floor in a heap and he lets out a sigh, bringing his arms over his head.

A small crack resonates through his silent room. He, then, snatches the pile from the floor and hides it deep in his closet.

His mother wouldn't dare look through his things, but just as a

precaution. As he slips on his pajamas—an Eraserhead themed set that took him so long to find—Izuku listens for any hint of noise. *Nothing*. He tip-toes towards the door and opens it, slow and steady. Peeking out the little sliver of space, Izuku doesn't notice anything out of place.

Throughout his life, regardless of the place, Izuku was always careful with how he stepped into an area. It was a habit that set itself home into his body. *If you make a sound, you get hurt*. Even if the said place was *home*, he couldn't help it.

He finds himself in the kitchen. His mother was asleep, sitting on the chair and her head laying against her folded arms on the table. On the table, slips of green paper littered the wooden surface in sacks. A sheet of paper sat next to the stack. *A bill*.

It was a familiar sight regardless of his mom trying to keep him in the dark. A yawn slips from his lips, tears forming in the corner of his eyes. Despite his tired and blurry vision, he's able to locate a blanket stretched against the couch. He grabs the soft material and places it on her shoulders. She smiles and buries her face into her arms, the bags under her eyes were prominent.

It never fails to break his heart. *She doesn't deserve this*, but good people *always* get the short end of the stick.

It isn't fair but life never is.

Izuku worries his bottom lip, willing away the tears threatening to slip down his cheeks.

He's going to help her, he thinks, but...he's not sure how just yet.

—

The next day, Izuku checked with the school if students were allowed to work.

"Sorry kid," the receptionist said with a shrug.

Izuku walks through the halls with a finger against his lips, thinking.

If he can't work legally, it's possible he can use his "alter ego" for this. Maybe...he could give out information; he has notebooks and notebooks of every hero and vigilante that catches his eye...so maybe someone would be interested.

However, he doesn't want to work with villains—his hero-obsessed heart would wilt up at the thought. Under the same vein, he's not sure whether he can work with other vigilantes. In theory, he probably could, but he only knows *of* them, not personally. Heck, he doesn't think he's seen any vigilante where he usually patrols.

Working with heroes...wouldn't work. For one thing, he's literally doing illegal activity; even if he isn't using his quirk. Another thing is that he won't be able to work with one without letting out his fanboy rambles so yeah, that's out of the question.

"Maybe...I can sell my All Might merch..." Izuku mutters, heart breaking at the mere thought but this is for his mother, goddamn it.

Distracted, he doesn't notice a group walking his way until he bumps into someone.

"Fucking, Deku?" a familiar voice sneers.

Instantly, Izuku freezes and looks up. Blood red eyes glare at him as if he was an insignificant worm under his feet—nothing new.

"Ah—I'm sorry, Kacchan!" Izuku says, shoulders pressed against his ears and hands gripping his backpack strap so tight his knuckles turn white.

"Do you know him, Bakubro?" a friendly voice asks. It was the red-head that fought with Kacchan on the mat. Izuku's hand twitched, inching to grab his notebook and ask the other questions—he seems nice enough to humor him, even with his sharp teeth and all.

Before Kacchan could respond, a blonde haired boy and, interestingly enough, a black lightning bolt in his hair threw an arm around Kacchan's shoulders. Izuku almost has a heart attack right there.

"That's such a cute nickname, *Kacchan!*" he grins.

Scowling, Kacchan throws the arm off and growls at the boy, "Shut the fuck up, Dunc Face!"

Izuku uses that as a distraction to run the hell away.

—

After running for what felt like a long while, he stops in front of a bench and drops himself on the wooden surface, shoulders tense and hands shaking.

Izuku lets out a shaky breath, taking in the wind running through his curls and the birds chirping around him. With his eyes closed, Izuku almost didn't notice footsteps approaching him.

"Bakugou calls you Deku...", a familiar voice says.

Izuku's eyes open, biting his bottom lip and cracking his knuckles. He glances at Todoroki, who's staring at him with an unreadable expression.

"Yeah...he calls me Deku," he says, looking down at his feet as they kick the gown, "it's a nickname he gave me when we were kids."

Todoroki hums and sips his strawberry milk.

"It almost sounds like Dekiru," he says between his straw.

What.

"What?" Izuku exclaims, head shooting up. "What do you mean by that?!"

Todoroki sits on the bench, inches of space between them, and says, "It's just a thought."

Izuku sends him a look but Todoroki wasn't looking at him. The two sit in silence. It rattled Izuku's nerves.

"You know..." Todoroki finally says and Izuku perks up at the sound, "I've noticed you around—"

"Who's the stalker now?" Izuku interrupts, crossing his arms.

"—and," he continues, ignoring him.

Izuku huffs at him; he could've sworn he saw Todoroki's lips twitching upright.

"You seem so familiar..."

Izuku furrows his eyebrows, "Familiar?"

Todoroki nods, then he glances at him from the corner of his eye, "Maybe not right now, you seem kinda like a skittish rabbit..."

"Hey!" Izuku exclaims.

"Or, at least, how you portray yourself right now," Todoroki states. Izuku stops and stares at him, head tilted to the side, "I remember your battle with Shinsou. It was intense, and the way you moved reminds me of Dekiru...especially since I've seen your fighting style up close..."

"You..." Izuku stops but before he can say anything else, the bell rings.

The boys shared a look and rushed to their classes.

—

Dekiru is jumping on roofs, gliding between buildings. Wind is being thrown against his face, thankfully blocked by his mask, when he spots the looming figure of Endeavour stalking through the streets with fire spouting from his body not unlike weeds. Fiery weeds...

Endeavour stops in front of a building, scowling at a few reporters who were able to stop him. Dekiru lands on the roof of the same building, and spots a huge water hose on the roof.

Izuku gets an idea. He couldn't help the smirk that stretches on his face.

(Instantly, there's news coverage and videos everywhere on Herotube covering the exact movements when Number two Pro-Hero Endeavour is drenched with water from a building, his iconic flames wilting out and disappearing. He looked furious.

There isn't a culprit reported as of yet.)

—

After a few days of psyching himself up, Izuku finally corners Todoroki

and the two walk towards the very same bench they sat in a few days ago.

They sat in silence, air thick and suffocating; it almost made Izuku want to puke his guts out. Beside him, Todoroki didn't seem to notice the tension. He continues to sip on the strawberry flavored milk carton.

Izuku huffs, glaring at the tree in front of him. His fringes moved with the cool breeze that rushed past them.

"Don't tell anyone..." Izuku whispers into the air.

Todoroki sends him a glance, his expression blank as always, just for a second. That mere second felt like hours to Izuku, waiting with great anticipation for what the man will say.

Saying nothing, Todoroki returns his gaze back to his milk carton. Izuku lets out a breath, a mix of a deep sigh and a groan. He just wants this to be over and done with.

"You know," he finally says, "my old man hates your guts and wants everything to just capture you."

"...oh..." Izuku breathes out.

"But, I hate my dear old man. I'll hate to give him the satisfaction of knowing your identity," Todoroki admits without a second thought, "the fact that I, his offspring, knows who you are but he doesn't is great. He'll have an aneurysm. Also, I like you too much—"

"Wait what?!" Izuku exclaims, staring at the side of his head.

"—Dekiru is entertaining. I'm grateful for what you did a couple of days ago," Todoroki says, grabbing his phone and turning it on. He doesn't

even look for that long until the familiar screams of Endeavour fill the little space spared between the two.

Oh... Izuku thinks with an amused smile, "Why do you think it was Dekiru?"

Todoroki shrugs and glances over at him, "Just a feeling."

Izuku grins at him, widening when Todoroki sends him a small smile, barely noticeable.

With the birds chirping around them and the annoyed shouts of Endeavour playing in a loop, Izuku reckons that he has an ally of sorts now.

It feels nice, even if Todoroki is a little shit.

"Also, I saw you bump into a wall yesterday and apologize to it."

Izuku feels one of his eyes twitch.

"Shut up, Todoroki-kun."



it's in our blood.

Playing Vigilante

– vannahfanfics

Izuku's emerald eyes gleamed in the moonlight as he peered out the back door of the dormitory, looking left, right, and then left again. The light filtering down from the cloudy night sky barely illuminated the back alley behind the four-floor building, so Izuku took extra care to critically inspect the darkness. If anyone caught him, he'd surely be expelled.

A Support course student playing vigilante? Hell, he'd probably be *arrested*!

Izuku Midoriya had been born Quirkless. Despite that, his lifelong dream had been to attend U.A.'s Hero Course. Unfortunately, hopes and dreams only got one so far. Izuku had failed the hero examination miserably. Thankfully, he'd developed a penchant for constructing support equipment, well enough to earn himself acceptance into the school's Support Course.

However, his aspirations had never dampened. Thus, he'd designed his own hero costume and equipment in secret.

Tonight was the first time that his costume would undergo field testing.

Tentatively, Izuku edged out into the night, the leather of his hero costume squeaking and the thick iron of his mechanical boots clunking as he moved. He froze, head whipping back to the dorm hall with wild eyes. When nothing stirred, he hurried out and gently shut the door behind him. Breathing a small sigh of relief, he took a moment to steel his nerves.

I can't believe I'm about to do this! Oh, I hope it works! And I hope I don't make too much noise...

It was still early in the evening, so lights out had not been called, and someone could still stumble upon him. He could always turn back, he thought as he looked up at the back door, but his feet remained cemented to the ground. No, he couldn't turn back. He *wouldn't*. He was going to prove, once and for all, that a Quirkless boy like him could still be a hero.

Izuku stole away to the nearest training field.

Shadows veiled him like a cloak, shielding him as he crept back out into the open. The shattered and crumbled buildings of the mock city stood like solemn sentinels against the gray-blue backdrop of the sky, illuminated only by thin slivers of white light. Broken glass glared like sharp teeth in the gloom. The air rang with the gentle clang of Izuku's steps as he approached.

"Okay, okay," he muttered under his breath, rubbing his hands together to smear the nervous sweat blooming over his palms. "I flick my heels like this—" Glowing red light streamed through the grooves in his boots, pulsing with a gentle rhythm as energy pumped through the hydraulics. "To activate the mechanisms which will power up the motor—" A faint hum whirled in the metalworks, accented by the gentle clicking of gears. "And to activate the arm bracers, I flex like *this*—" Similarly, the metal armguards framing his forearm bloomed to life with red light streaming through the thin grooves. "All of which enhance my natural strength!"

The chirping of the crickets and the whizzing of his equipment were the only sounds perforating the silence. He inhaled sharply through his nose, then released through his mouth with a whistle. His emerald eyes bubbled with determination as he clenched his fists.

All right! I can do this!

Before he could talk himself out of it, he took off running.

Izuku cried out in alarm as the concrete cracked under his foot, and he vaulted six feet in the air. His arms and legs flailed as the wind whipped at his hair and clothes, trying to steady himself as the ground rushed up to meet him. He managed to stick the landing and leaped again, using both his legs this time. The hydraulics screamed in his mechanical boots as he skyrocketed up the side of one of the skyscrapers.

As his momentum dwindled, he slammed his hands into the cement, metal coverings on his fingers digging in and sending cracks rippling through the gray stone. He held himself suspended and planted his boots against the surface, springing off in a wall jump to the opposite building. The force blasted a hole in the wall; dust and chunks of rock spilled like a waterfall into the alley below. An ecstatic grin split his face as he savored the adrenaline rushing through his blood.

He scaled the towering buildings with successive jumps until he rocketed into the sky, tilting back and stretching his arms out on either side of him. The clouds parted to reveal the full moon, and it bathed him in its soft white glow like he was *ascending*.

Then gravity got to work.

"Oh jeez!" he squeaked as he realized he was falling backward into the open air. Though his first instinct was to panic, he forced his sparking brain to refocus and remembered the secondary apparatus he'd installed in the soles of his boots. He pressed down on the hidden mechanism in the insole of his shoe, and a stream of compressed air blasted from the rugged bottoms of his metal boots, sending him arcing back just far enough for him to make it to a rooftop. He released the button and back-flipped, landing in a crouch on the stone.

He took a minute to recollect himself. Sweat dripped from his pine green hair and rolled down his freckled face, and his lungs greedily sucked in air as his heart pounded against his ribcage. Slowly, he stood, his leg joints groaning from the strain of the heavy boots. He'd have to see about replacing them with a lighter alloy –but that didn't matter now.

"Everything works! I can be a hero!" he cried triumphantly to the starry night sky.

He continued to think that until he finally made it back down to the ground, only to find a purple-haired individual in their school uniform staring at him with lidded eyes. Izuku melted bonelessly to the ground, nonsensical stammers spilling from his mouth as his irises shrank into the whites of his eyes. Then he could only think one thing:

Oh no, oh no, oh no, oh no, oh no!

The boy's wisteria hair glowed softly like spun lavender blossoms as the clouds parted again, casting light over the both of them. His expression was unreadable, while Izuku's panic was painted all over his paling face. The boy's eyes slid down to Izuku's metal shoes, and he only asked–

"Did you make those?"

—

The boy's name was Hitoshi Shinso. He was a first-year like Izuku, only in the General Studies course. A night owl with frequent insomnia, he'd been taking a walk around campus to try and tire himself out before bed when he'd spotted Izuku slinking away toward the training areas. Curious, he'd followed, witnessing Izuku's airborne acrobatics and fine craftsmanship on full display.

So that's how Izuku found himself developing support equipment for his would-be vigilante partner.

Hitoshi's Quirk was fascinating; if anyone responded to his voice, he could take over their body. Hitoshi was bitter about it at first, often receiving comments that he was better suited to be a villain, but Izuku gushed over the more heroic aspects of his Quirk— he could take control of spooked civilians and get them to safety or nab a villain without them even realizing it by engaging in snarky banter. Hitoshi had seemed a little uplifted by Izuku's enchantment with the possibilities.

Izuku wanted to give Hitoshi something unique, not just a carbon-copy of his own equipment. He stewed over it for a few days, not arriving at any clear inspiration until he spotted Eraserhead passed out in his sleeping bag in the middle of the hallway one afternoon. The revelation had struck him like lightning, and he nearly tripped over himself a dozen times while scrambling back to his room to draft up a prototype.

After five days blurred by coffee and the invention high, Izuku stood before Hitoshi, wiggling his fingers and biting down on his bottom lip to barely suppress his immense excitement. Hitoshi eyed the gray-white strips of cloth in his hands hesitantly.

"Does this count as copyright infringement?" the lavender-haired boy asked as he timidly looped it around his neck. Izuku shook his head rapidly.

"Nope! The formula is patented, but this is my own special alloy that is probably different than Eraserhead's. It should still be perfectly functional, though!" he blathered as he helped adjust the strips of cloth around Hitoshi's neck. Izuku had recreated Eraserhead's signature capture weapon for Hitoshi, which would give him the same degree of maneuverability as Izuku's strength-enhancing mechanics while embodying Hitoshi's more subtle style of combat. With Hitoshi's stealth

and quick wit and Izuku's raw power, the Support student fancied themselves quite the team.

Hitoshi seemed to think so too, as he flashed the green-haired boy a grateful smile as he played with the capture weapon.

"I can't believe I'm doing this," he chuckled. They had snuck out to one of the training grounds again, this time the suburban neighborhood. His expression was serene as he looked out into the night, appreciating the buildings' shadows and skinny light poles through lidded amethyst eyes. Izuku smiled sheepishly as he rocked back and forth on his heels.

"Yeah... Sorry, I got you all roped up in my crazy scheme," he joked. Hitoshi rolled his head on his neck to smirk languidly at him.

"Izuku, I wouldn't be here if I didn't want to be. I get it, you know?" he sighed and slipped his hands into his pockets, turning to look back up at the starry night sky again. "It's just not fair... How a Quirk can define what you can and can't be. If you have the heart for it, why not be given a chance?"

Izuku's wide emerald eyes fixed on Hitoshi in wonder. When the lavender-haired young man looked at him again, he balked, turning pink in mild embarrassment. "Wh-what?"

"That was so poetic..."

"You're so weird," Hitoshi snickered and elbowed him in the ribs. Izuku squeaked and shimmied away from him. "Hey," he continued, and Izuku looked up to see a wide grin on his face. "Wanna race?"

"Su—"

Before he could finish, Izuku felt the oddest sensation of descending

into water before his body ceased obeying his commands. He knew immediately that he'd fallen prey to Hitoshi's Quirk, but he could do nothing as the boy whipped his capture weapon and swung into the night. After a few seconds, Izuku's body jerked as he was released from the trance.

"Hey! That's *cheating*!" Izuku cried indignantly and snapped his heels down to activate the mechanics of his boots. They whirled to life, and he blasted forward in a jump, denting the rooftop from the force. Hitoshi's laughter floated on the wind, rising in volume as Izuku dashed after the boy swinging from power line to power line.

"What? You don't think you can beat me without a head start?" Izuku challenged when he caught up. Hitoshi flashed him a cutthroat grin and snapped his weapon cloth again so hard Izuku could see his muscles flex beneath the loose material of his black suit.

Just as Hitoshi went to deliver a snarky reply, the horrific sound of colliding and crunching metal pierced the night air. They both skidded to a halt on the pavement, looking around wildly to pinpoint the source.

"Hitoshi! Isn't there a highway overpass near here?" Izuku recalled suddenly. Hitoshi's eyes darted around wildly as he struggled to remember the immediate area's geography. His lavender irises then brightened with recognition, and he pointed to a tree line flanking the training area. They both charged forward without saying another word, leaping over the tree line onto the black fencing surrounding the complex.

The northbound lane of the overpass was entirely blocked by a massive, multi-car pile-up. Several cars were flipped over, lying on their sides, or crushed between others. However, the most pressing issue was the small car that had slammed through the concrete walls lining the roadway to teeter precariously close to plummeting one hundred feet

to the busy street below.

"We have to help them!" Izuku cried. Hitoshi grabbed his arm, squeezing tight and staring at him with wild eyes.

"Izuku! We don't have any kind of licensing! If the cops or pros show up, they'll—"

"Then what are we even doing this for?" Izuku demanded hotly, wrenching his arm away to glare at the other boy. "Why are we out here, if not to help people? They don't have time to wait!" he insisted, pointing at the car wobbling on the edge of the overpass. "You're supposed to be my partner! Either you're with me, or you're not!"

As Izuku glared at Hitoshi with tears brimming in his eyes, the other boy slowly relaxed. Hitoshi closed his eyes and took a deep breath; when he released it and opened his eyes again, they were burning with the intense fire of determination.

"Let's do it."

They surged off again, side-by-side as they rapidly proceeded to the overpass.

"You get on the overpass and use your capture weapon to brace the car!" Izuku panted. "It probably won't be strong enough, but it'll give me just enough time to come up from underneath! If I get enough momentum, I should be able to push it back up onto the highway!"

Hitoshi nodded before using the surrounding buildings to swing up. As he landed on the thin concrete wall, he wrapped his capture weapon around the midsection of the car before winding it around the nearby light pole. He used himself as a counterweight, bracing himself perpendicularly against the structure and pulling with all his might on

the cloth. Even with the enhanced fibers, Hitoshi's strength alone was not nearly enough to match the two-ton car. It inched further and further off the precipice.

Izuku raced through traffic. Just as he hit the side of the overpass, a puddle of shadow enveloped him, and he looked up to see the car had slipped off to dangle into the open air. He could see the young teenager inside, curled up in the driver's seat as she awaited the inevitable. Hitoshi was sliding up the concrete wall, arms quaking and teeth clenched as he struggled to hold on.

Izuku pushed down into a crouch, bearing down on his boots. The gears whirled and clanked as they gathered force, whirling faster and faster until steam began to slither from within the machinery. Just as the whirring mounted into a high-pitched whine, Izuku released the mechanism, sending him screaming up towards the hood of the car. He crossed his armguards over his head as he slammed into the vehicle.

Metal crunched as he crumpled into the front end of the car. The momentum sent them both shooting up, and as they became level with the overpass, Izuku gave it an extra kick to throw it back. It jerkily landed safely on the concrete, while Izuku hovered a bit in the open air.

Before he could use his air stream to get to safety, Hitoshi's capture weapon snapped around his waist. He swung like a pendulum to dangle below Hitoshi, who flashed him a breathy smirk.

"You all right there, *partner*?"

"Oh, you know," Izuku panted. "*Hanging in there.*"

Wailing sirens rapidly approached, bringing with them flashing lights.

"Whoops. Time to go," Hitoshi grunted. He released the end of the

capture weapon and used it to swing back towards campus, toting Izuku along like a kite. When they finally landed, Izuku clumsily flopped into the dirt, groaning as nausea twisted his belly. Hitoshi sighed and threaded his fingers through his sweaty lavender hair while tugging his capture weapon free.

"Well, that was... Eventful." His tone was so calm, but Izuku could see from the shine in his lavender eyes and the breathless grin on his face that he was exhilarated. Izuku snickered as he sat up, tucking his legs under himself and grabbing his ankles.

"Yeah! We're real heroes!"

"I wish we could have stuck around to see if she was okay," Hitoshi frowned with a glance at the tree line. Red and blue lights flickered just over the tops of the pines, and the sirens echoed through the otherwise silent campus. Izuku frowned and cocked his head to the side.

"Yeah... But, it would have been pretty bad if we were caught," Izuku said, drooping a little at the sobering reality. If they were in the Hero Course, they'd be chastised for acting without hero licenses, but it would likely be a slap on the wrist compared to being busted for vigilante activity. Izuku still had to smile. "Still... We know, and she knows. I think that's all that matters. We did the right thing."

"Yeah. You're right."

They both nearly jumped out of their skins as they were snapped up in a capture weapon that was most *definitely* not Shinso's.

"Well, well, well... A couple of students up past their bedtimes, playing vigilantes, no less," a gravelly voice tutted. Izuku began to quiver violently as the black-haired man strode towards them, one hand each holding the ends of the cloth wrapped tightly around them.

"E-Eraserhead?"

The pro hero squinted critically at Shinso, who was grimacing and trying to will himself out of existence.

"What's this? I've got a copycat. I'm not sure if I should be offended or flattered."

"M-mister Eraserhead, sir, please— It's not what it looks like— Well, I suppose it is what it looks like but, uh, please!—"

Eraserhead turned his dull gaze on Izuku as the boy began to babble nonsensically. After about a minute of his rambles, an artery bulged in the teacher's forehead, and he snapped, *"Quiet!"*

"Y-yessir!" Izuku squeaked and shrunk into the cloth. Eraserhead groaned and rubbed his forehead.

"You two aren't Hero Course students, are you?" They both shook their heads. "You do know that vigilantism is illegal, don't you?" They nodded. "Yet you still went to the lengths of designing equipment and going out doing illegal hero work?" They nodded again.

Eraserhead sagged. "This is Naruhata all over again," he grumbled. After a second of staring off into space, he released their bindings. Izuku and Hitoshi regarded him nervously.

"I *should* report you to administration and have you expelled," Eraserhead grumped, making them flinch and exchange nervous glances. Eraserhead tutted and rubbed his stubbled chin thoughtfully. "... But your performance and teamwork were exemplary. You were even able to escape without being caught. It's impressive, for two students who haven't even had hero training..."

Hitoshi and Izuku both jerked upright when Eraserhead glared at them.

"Tell me, what does being a hero mean to you?"

Izuku wracked his mind, desperately looking for something Eraserhead wanted to hear. Just as he opened his mouth to speak, the words died in his throat. *If I tell him what he wants to hear, he'll know I'm lying.* Izuku closed his mouth and eyes to gather his thoughts, inhaling deeply. *I have to be honest.*

"Sir, I don't like heroes— at least, not what heroes mean in our society. I don't think it's fair that politics and Quirks get to decide who gets to be a hero or not," Izuku said, opening his eyes to stare adamantly at him. "I want to *help* people, but I've been told time and time again that I can't because I'm Quirkless. I'm not going to let that get in my way! Even if I have to break the law and become a vigilante, I want to help as many people as I can!"

"And you?" Eraserhead said to Hitoshi. The purple-haired boy frowned and rubbed the back of his neck awkwardly.

"I'm, uh, not good with words, but that's about right."

Eraserhead stared at them for a few seconds; then, he smirked.

"Is that so? You've both got guts; I'll give you that," he chuckled warmly. Izuku found himself sagging slightly in relief. "All right. I like your spirit, and you have talent. We'll keep the details of this little encounter secret, but I'll recommend the two of you to the Hero Course." Just as they both gasped in excitement, he pointed a stern finger. "But no more running off in the middle of the night playing vigilantes! I *won't* save you if you're arrested."

Hitoshi and Izuku both hid smiles behind their hands as Eraserhead

whirled on his heel, grumbling something about being too old to deal with things like this. As soon as Eraserhead vanished into the shadows, Hitoshi looked at Izuku with a big smirk.

"You don't have any intentions of stopping, do you?"

"Absolutely not," Izuku grinned and flexed his arms. "Imagine how many people we can help waiting for all the paperwork to go through, right?" Hitoshi tipped back his head in laughter.

"You said it. So... Where do you wanna head first? The night is young."

Izuku grinned widely, his blood already singing again. They made quite a team, indeed.



The Flame is Consumed by His Own Kindling

– Taro

This was never how he imagined standing on UA's sport's festival rink would feel if he was being honest. When he was young and full of naive optimism about the future, Izuku had always pictured standing on this flat, dirt field alone. There would be a medal around his neck, the sun beating down on him, and the words *I told you* so burning like his father's fire on his tongue. Izuku could still feel phantom hands on his shoulders, hear the 'I'm proud of you' his mother would give him when he got home, taste the katsudon that she would make to celebrate. Not for the first time he wonders if she would forgive him for all that he has done.

But given the chance to trade this moment for that, he would take this crime filled night that the stars are forced to bear witness to. No, all the medals in the world wouldn't be worth seeing Enji's face bruised and bloodied and looking at his sons like they were the fates, come to cut his life's cord right in front of his eyes.

Izuku is pulled from his thoughts on what could have been by the hysterical laughter from his oldest brother. The man shoves his boot into Endeavor's chest so hard the man chokes on the air in his lungs and the green haired boy wonders at what point that sound started sounding like music instead of a nightmare. Endeavor's fire had long since gone out, and it was strange to see someone so cruel looking so vulnerable. Enji Todoroki had been picked apart every step of the fight by the child he had called worthless, had pinned down and held there by the quirk he had claimed would never be enough, was now dying at the hands of the son he had presumed dead without checking to make sure.

A fitting end, but not one that Izuku is anxious to rush his way into, he still has questions, after all. And the only man that could give him the answers still has enough breath in his lungs to give them to him.

"If you have something to say, say it. Who knows how much longer Endeavor will be alive to hear it." Shouto's voice is brash but not biting. Izuku can hear the undertones of concern there, even louder the curiosity.

It had taken him a few weeks to fully read his brother but now that he could the dual chromatic boy might as well have been announcing his thoughts to Izuku through a megaphone. And even now, boots adding to his already towering height, blood splattered across his hands and chest, ice creeping up his neck in early signs of quirk overuse, his brother looks like a child. Izuku wonders if he looks the same, or if that part of him had been stamped out already, leaving behind only the villainous underbelly of his mind.

"Oh not long. I'm thinking ten minutes? Fifteen if we tell Touya to slow down." Izuku is grateful for how easy his voice is to find even after the hours of silence. Well, relative silence compared to the venting, angry, monologues that his brothers delivered while fighting. Izuku gave them space happily, speaking only to give his teammates tips on where to aim their blows. If all the world was a stage, and this fight their performance, then Shouto and Touya were actors and he was a stage hand ensuring it all went to plan.

"Ten minutes," Shouto repeats quietly, eyes locking in on the man laying on the ground and the ghost of a smile appears on his lips. To Izuku it may as well have been a scream, jumping up and down like the little kid he was never fully allowed to be. It felt good, to be able to give Shouto just a little bit of joy from his father even if it was in the most unorthodox way that one could imagine and they had to pry it out of cold dying hands.

Touya is still fighting, arm winding back over and over again as Izuku approaches and the ground goes from dusty to splattered to soaked the closer the green haired boy gets to the epicenter. His brother doesn't pause until Izuku's hand wraps loosely around his elbow.

"Shouto's about to go blue and I wanna talk to him about something." Touya glances between Izuku and the mess of a man beneath him and shrugs, aiming one last blow to the face, he stands and wipes his hands on the obnoxious trench coat he had insisted on stealing months ago.

"If you kill him make it messy," Izuku doesn't quite laugh, but the sound is definitely closer to a chuckle than a sigh.

"You mean more than the lake you're created around him and stained my favorite sneakers with? I'll pass." Touya snorts, shaking his head, and it's still so strange to see the white hair out so openly after years of dying it in public bathrooms and keeping hats around to hide the roots when they can't to avoid their teammates finding out. It's liberating in its own way though, to see his brother being able to live that much freer now that Endeavor was out of the picture. Or, soon to be at least.

Plus, Izuku can't deny that it's not nice to be able to easily spot the man in the dark on midnight missions like this.

He watches Touya throw an arm around Shouto's shoulders, chest shaking with a laugh that Izuku can almost hear over the hero's pained breathing beneath him if he tries. The red and white boy offers only a playful shove or two before leaning into the warmth of Touya to stave off hypothermia until he can go home. One day they'll work on his fire and making the boy more comfortable in using it for fighting but right now, the fact that Shouto was willing to use it at all was enough progress for him. They had all the time in the world, and it would stay that way if Izuku had to wind the clocks back himself.

"You know, as much as I hate to admit it, you're right." He can hear the sharp inhale, but doesn't turn to the man quite yet, still watching his brothers, achy but energized as they were, rough house ever so slightly. "I would never have been a good hero. I have too much of your anger, and even a holy flame will burn those who touch it."

"You'll....pay for this." It's only then that Izuku crouches down, bringing his face right up to the man's even as Endeavor averts his gaze back to the two kids playing down field.

"We already did. There's nothing more to us that we could give you that you haven't already taken." Izuku brings his hand to his father's face and his stomach only turns a little bit when he feels the blood on his hands, but he just has to see them, he has to see into Enji's eyes again. He has to know what's behind them. There's silence as he holds the too hot skin, wondering how much of it is from a fever from his wounds and how much of it is from his quirk, still though, the redhead doesn't meet his gaze.

"They could have been heroes, you know that right?" There's a halfhearted attempt at a laugh but it's more so a wheeze that ends with the man coughing up blood. Izuku continues. "Between Shouto with a perfect quirk and Touya with a self-destructive one you would have two sides of the quirk coin represented. And in another life, maybe I would have gone into support to keep them safe, or maybe I would have been the first quirkless hero and I would be an inspiration to kids everywhere." His stomach turned when his father's eyes slid to his slower than Izuku knew was possible. When their gazes do meet, Izuku can't look away. He can't fathom how eyes can be so empty.

The blue is nothing like his brothers' in any way but color. They're cold and detached and the fire behind them burns on nothing that Izuku can understand. Even now, when he's beaten to a pulp and help isn't coming he refuses to acknowledge that he is losing. Not even to

himself. His teammates know when they are losing, always understand that if they are it's better to rethink what they're next step is than to keep pushing forwards and end up trapped in the mud. Usually doing so by falling back and asking what he thinks is the best move, or flat out grabbing him and taking off.

"Those two? They could do anything in the entire world and I would be behind them to make sure that they came out the other side. They could kill god and I would find a way for them to do it." Izuku pulls the gun from his pocket, but there's no sign from the man that he feels the movement and the two are still locked in gazes. He wonders what Enji sees in his eyes. Is it his mother? Is it fragments of him? Or is it something else all together, something that is entirely Izuku's creation?

"But the only person I want to kill is you for putting us here." The gun comes to rest at Endeavor's chest, but Izuku makes no more moves, eyes still searching as he brings himself to ask the question that's haunted him for years. "I'm only going to ask you once and one time only. Why did you choose my mother for an affair?"

The answer is barely out of his mouth before Izuku makes sure that it's the last thing he'll ever have to hear Endeavor say as a hero.

—

When they return to base, covered in dirt and blood and injuries that weren't there when they left, it's still hours till morning and the only one up and moving is Kurogiri. He says nothing as the boys pass through, and Izuku can't tell if that's better or worse than asking where they've been. Shouto falls asleep first, body weighed down by dozens of blankets and Dabi slides into bed next to him to act like a personal heater until the teen's temperature can regulate itself properly again.

Izuku showers, he changes, he takes his notebooks of plans of what they

would do when they got a hold of their abuser. His fingers skim the pages with his feet hanging from a stool too tall for him to properly use. Kurogiri says nothing as the teen puts on the news and waits. His blood thrums with energy from what they did and anticipation for how it will be reported. The last page has a list of names of heroes that Izuku had drawn up the day he decided he was leaving his old life behind. Endeavor was at the top of the list of course but there were still so many, more than they used to be even after Touya and Shouto's additions.

When dawn comes, and with it the news reports that announce Endeavor's lost quirk, life threatening injuries, and the fall of another number one hero, it brings with it a new plan. Shouto is the first to join him for breakfast and Izuku doesn't even look up from his journal as he speaks.

"So, the bird or the bunny next? The walking denim was handled for us already." And the day begins with a smiling chimera and two cups of coffee that Kurogiri makes sure have nothing stronger than caffeine in them.





What Happens in Alleys

– Iffondrel

The city had always been a tumultuous place filled with people and dangers of all kinds. To those who clung to the shadows and lived precarious lives day by day, there was no guarantee that any beacon of hope would ever shine for them. All too often, it seemed, lives were lost in preventable ways and people with no power in this world were just supposed to adapt. Like it was so easy. Like everyone didn't have their own fears and aspirations, only to have it all come crumbling down. It didn't matter how many heroes filled the streets, spouting their agendas and standing tall as pinnacles that the public was meant to celebrate. They were never around when the innocent needed them most anyway.

As the sun faded from the street to be replaced with artificial luminescence, Midoriya took the streets. He twined his way through unmarked alleys, down little-used side streets and through stray clumps of decorative brush. He was unseen by the rest of the world. Nondescript, powerless, nothing standing out. Just a stray kid that had gone too far out of his way to be here. In Hosu City.

And for what?

The lights from a passing car neared, and he swiftly pressed his back against a cold stone wall to avoid being seen. When the vehicle had passed, he released a weary breath. Even if he wasn't very prominent on his own, he didn't want to be challenged by anyone who'd stop to ask why a kid like him was out in *this* part of the city.

He just... needed to see it. He needed to know that this feeling inside him wasn't a lost cause. If the world was going to reject him, then he

wasn't going to stay quiet for the rest of his life. He couldn't accept such a fate.

Quirkless.

Useless.

Never going to be a hero.

But what did heroes ever do for him? Even in spite of the pressures to succeed, heroes never saved those who needed it the most. There were so many fakes in the world that he was truly at a loss. It was too much. And now it felt like there was no place to go but here.

Midoriya kept on his path, cautious but determined. There was no telling what he might encounter on these streets. But he'd been training—getting stronger, getting *faster*. It felt like it was all he was good for. For many vigilantes patrolling the street, that was enough. He didn't possess any of those grand, flashy powers that so many heroes toted around. Quirks be damned, even if they'd never accept him as a hero, he could still exist as this. He was smart and agile. And, if worse came to worse, the long-bladed knife strapped to his belt was his weapon of choice. It was no sword, but he knew how to use it.

When finally his destination was laid before him, it felt... listless. A fairly standard alleyway not unlike the countless others scattered between each street, sitting snug between two of Hosu's buildings. If anyone else came through here, they might not even recognize just how important this place was. But Midoriya knew.

Shreds of police tape still drifted through the concrete path, caught on overflowing dumpsters and large bags of garbage. The signs of battle stood out so clearly to him because he knew where to look: nicks in the wall from scathing blades, skid marks on the ground, traces of flames,

their residual burns black and twisting all the way through the alley. The people who'd been here, the people who'd *fought* here... he wished he could've seen it for himself. But if he'd been here, it probably would've done little to change the outcome. Stain had been arrested on these streets, and there was nothing he could've done to prevent that. The vigilante had become a martyr for everyone in the world that saw hero society for the flawed system that it was.

It had been broadcast everywhere, shown in every newspaper and online article—*Stain's last stand*.

With his feet placed where Stain had once stood, Midoriya thought he'd feel something. Maybe some emotion or feeling of determination would well inside him. His shoes kicked at dirt clods and a thin layer of ash that had yet to be washed away by rain. Looking around at the blank, dirty walls and dingy sidewalks, it was hard to believe that anything of importance had happened here at all.

"You were right... but at what cost?" Midoriya murmured somberly. He wished he knew how to step up in the world without becoming a tool of the system that had been Stain's downfall. He wasn't out for murder, or vengeance, or notoriety... but he still wanted to make a difference. Whatever that meant in such a tumultuous time where things were changing constantly. Villains would rise and fall. Heroes would gain fame before meeting their untimely demise. But the nameless vigilantes hiding in the shadows would always be out in the world.

Midoriya came to the entrance of the alley. He recognized it from the pictures. Just to his left, in the center of the sidewalk, he could almost hear Stain's last words being yelled for all to witness.

Just try and stop me, you fakes...!

How bittersweet. To think that someone so strong and capable had met

their match in a place like this. Fighting those false heroes and standing for his honor, only to be apprehended and sent to Tartarus while the world fell silent to his biting words.

"Who are you?"

Jarred from the moment, Midoriya wheeled around, hand reaching for his knife. *Damn! I should've been more cautious!*

"You're not supposed to be here." Midoriya's eyes followed the voice to its source. Standing on the other side of the street was a hero—no, a hero *student*—that he recognized from all the overwhelming press coverage. Shouto Todoroki: the son of that deplorable false hero, Endeavor, and the very person that had been on the scene when Stain was arrested.

The student took a decisive step forward, and Midoriya retreated back one. He must've noticed the way his hand was hovering over a partially-concealed weapon. Todoroki took up a stance in response, and Midoriya could swear he could feel the temperature around him shifting under the influence of his dual-natured quirk.

Midoriya had to think. *No, I can't take him—he's a trained hero! Those powers... I don't want to get caught up in that. If I run—no, no, no, his ice is fast, I'd never get away. It'd look bad if I tried to run, too. Physical confrontation isn't the way to go. So then...*

"I..." Midoriya stood up straighter to make his voice heard. "I was just passing through," he said confidently. It wasn't a total lie—there wasn't exactly much to see here, after all. He'd hoped for more, but what was he supposed to expect after all that had transpired here? All that was left in this unassuming alleyway were the memories of what he couldn't be here to witness himself.

Todoroki didn't look convinced. He didn't budge from his position. "Is that so? Time might've passed, but this is still a monitored crime scene." He nodded towards where some police tape was flapping listlessly in the breeze, torn from its original placement. "I was sent here to secure the area. It might've been a few weeks, but we're still getting reports of people coming here to pay tribute to the guy who was arrested."

The way that hero looked down at him suspiciously said all that it needed to without the words ever leaving his lips. It was a warning to get out of this cursed place without causing any unnecessary trouble for him. But Midoriya didn't want to let an opportunity like this pass him by if it meant he could be just a little closer to the reality of what had transpired that fateful night. He couldn't trust heroes—not after the kind of life he'd lived to reach this point. But *Stain*. Stain was different. The only one to speak the truth of hero society in front of everyone. And he'd been shut down for it. The daring vigilante had messed up somewhere along the way, and his trail of killings wasn't something that could be overlooked, regardless of the ideology he was trying to preach. That's where they differed.

Tonight wouldn't be like Stain's end. Not with the hero poised in front of him, and not with anyone. He could hold steadfast to his beliefs... but nobody would need to be hurt for them.

Midoriya sighed and raised his hands in front of him. "I'm not here to cause trouble." And that was the truth.

The hero frowned, muscles still tensed if he needed to make a move, but he broke from his stance and seemed almost to relax a bit. It's not like there was much Midoriya could've done to retaliate if a fight broke out in this cramped space, but in this uncertain world of quirks one could never be too cautious.

"In that case, you should probably leave before it gets much later,"

Todoroki grumbled, noting the darkening sky. He pulled a roll of police tape from a pouch at his side and crossed over to one side of the alley. "If you have no business here, then I can't imagine why you'd want to hang around a place like this..."

Midoriya traced his eyes over the lingering scars of battle embedded in the concrete walls pressing to either side of him. "Actually... I *do* have business here."

The air grew colder around him, and it wasn't caused by the lack of sun. Midoriya could feel the chilled concrete beneath his shoes. His breath fogged in front of him, and a shiver ran up his spine, bringing awareness to the kind of situation he'd put himself in.

"And just what would that be?"

Midoriya leaned back against one of the alleyway walls, imagining the fight that must've broken out here. "I want to know what happened here... what *he* was like."

A beat of silence, followed by a timid response. "Do you mean... Endeavor?"

"No!" Midoriya snapped, annoyed. "I mean *Stain*! This was his last stand—the place where he fought against hero society for the last time! You were there, weren't you? Don't you feel *anything*?"

For the first time in their meeting, the student seemed to deeply consider what he'd said. He lowered the police tape, and the air didn't feel quite so cold anymore. "That's... difficult," he murmured quietly, so that Midoriya had to strain to hear. "A lot happened here. They only ever talk about Stain's defeat, but nothing about what happened before that. A hero almost died. I almost lost my classmate. It was... an incredibly difficult fight."

Midoriya furrowed his brow, a skeptical grimace tugging at the corner of his mouth. The way this kid was talking made it sound like he was the one doing all the hero work during the encounter with Stain. The temptation to inquire further was too much to resist. "You were there for all of that."

"...Yes. I was."

"So your impression of Stain?" Midoriya urged.

Todoroki relented, though he didn't seem happy about it. A sore subject, he supposed. "Stain was tenacious, hell-bent in his ways. He was fast and calculating, always difficult to hit. That didn't have anything to do with his quirk – that was a different obstacle." He hesitated, as though finding the words to continue and contemplating how much is *too much* to say. He must've reached some sort of conclusion, though, because the words he said next sent a ripple of excitement through Midoriya. "He was a formidable opponent, I guess. I wouldn't want to face him alone."

"That's amazing," Midoriya breathed.

That wasn't a good answer. In his moment of awed honesty, Midoriya had said the wrong thing. Todoroki scowled, busying himself once more with the police tape. "If that's your response, then you *really* shouldn't be here," he grumbled. "Go home."

Midoriya retreated further into the alley, worried that he might've pushed his luck with the student. Unfortunately for the both of them, he wasn't done. "No, I–!" Midoriya felt Todoroki's icy glare fixate on him. He took a deep breath, aligning his thoughts. It wasn't every day he got a chance like this to speak one-on-one with someone in the hero industry. The last time had been... a let-down. And a wake-up call as to where he stood in this world. Somehow, it felt like this was all he had left. "Stain

did a lot of things, I realize that. And maybe he took things too far, but I understand that he wanted change in this flawed hero society. I... I really wanted to be a hero. For the longest time—since I was just a little kid. But then someone I really admired told me that I couldn't be one. And I think that broke this façade I had put over this system."

Todoroki listened quietly while setting about with his task. He pointedly stretched the police tape over the alleyway entrance, securing it in place. Every so often, Midoriya would notice his gaze shift to various parts of the alley, like he was envisioning what had happened here in clear detail. "So then what does this place have to do with it?"

"I-it's just, he challenged the system!" Midoriya stammered, defending his case. "I mean, if you worked your whole life to be a hero, only to be shut down, why shouldn't that shift your perspective? There's so many unworthy heroes in the world, too. Am I supposed to just admit defeat?"

Todoroki finished up what he'd been sent to do. "Don't you think I'd know about the cruelty that happens in the hero world? I could never turn a blind eye to it, but that doesn't mean I should admonish it entirely. Because people still rely on heroes, and it's my job to help those people regardless of what's happening around me. If your intentions are noble and you're striving to help people instead of hurt them, then that makes you a hero."

And that's... that's where Stain went wrong.

A stiff night breeze blew through the narrow concrete space, causing the newly installed police tape to ripple. Midoriya drew his coat tighter around him. "I don't want to hurt anyone, if that's what you're waiting to hear. I only ever wanted to help."

Todoroki nodded in understanding. "Then I wish you good luck with that, wherever you end up. I hope I never have to encounter you in an

alley like this the way I did with Stain.” He turned around and began walking away. Despite the task he’d been sent to do, he didn’t seem all that keen on reinforcing the blatant message spelled out in bold lettering on the police tape.

Midoriya breathed a sigh of relief as the student disappeared around the corner. He’d ended up saying something right after all.

Left alone in the ever-darkening alley, Midoriya felt like he’d been given some things to consider. Despite the briefness of their encounter, it’d provided him with context he hadn’t had before. How easy it had been to get so engrossed with the words of a few select people. His hero’s rejection of Midoriya’s ideals and Stain’s rejection of the system that had solidified those very ideals.

Midoriya’s hand drifted towards the cold steel of his knife. He’d long since resolved himself to using it if the situation ever called for such measures. Maybe Stain had gotten too used to using such weapons.

This society had been at fault for putting him down. That didn’t mean he’d stop, though. If it meant that he could help people, then he was determined to do it. He could keep training without a school or a license. He could get faster and stronger than he was now. Already, he wasn’t the same weak and naïve person he’d been when his dream was shattered. Midoriya had already decided that he wanted to be a hero. Not the kind that the public recognizes or that society upholds despite its flaws, but one that can work quietly. A vigilante in the streets that could help others when no heroes were around. Yes, that was it.

As Midoriya slipped out from the opposite end of the alley and into the streets of the city, he found himself agreeing with that Todoroki kid. *Don’t worry. You’ll never have to fight me like you did Stain. But don’t be surprised if you end up seeing me again. After all, a hero’s work is never done.*





Ambiguity

A Villain / Vigilante Deku Zine